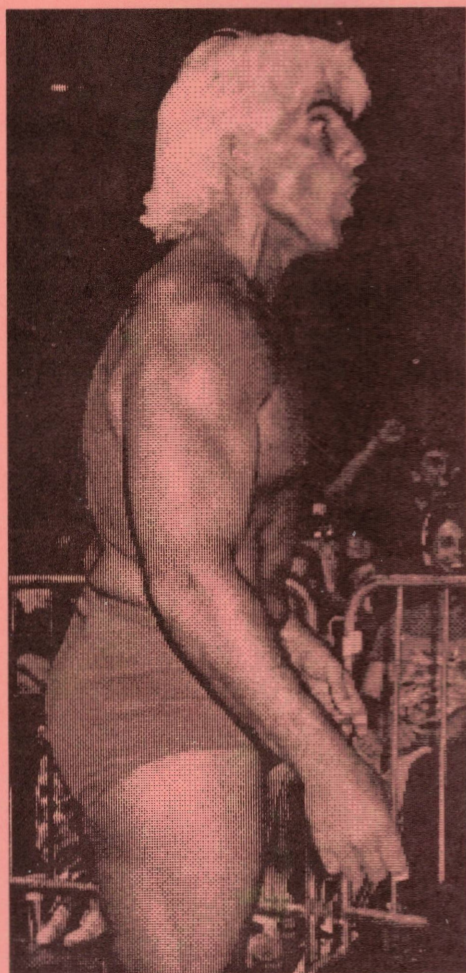


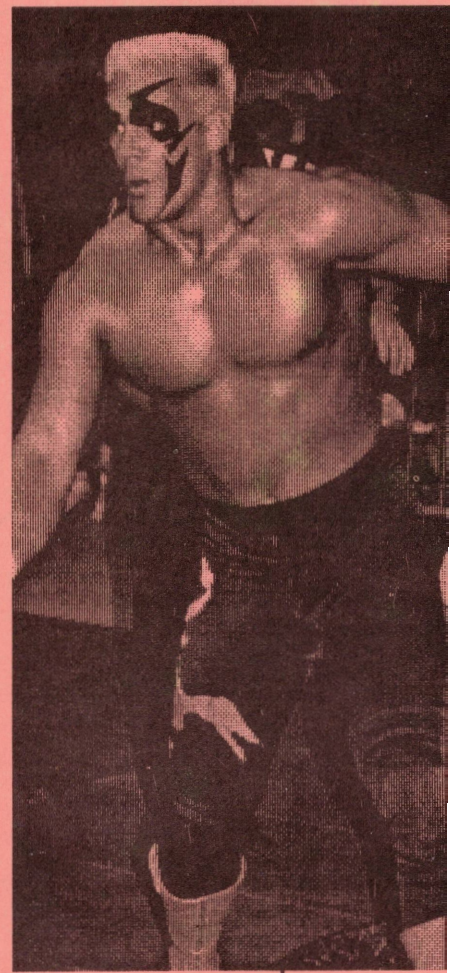
PRO WRESTLING 1992



RIC FLAIR: MVP OF THE YEAR



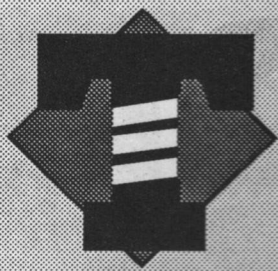
BRIAN CHRISTOPHER: ROOKIE OF THE YEAR



STING: BABYFACE OF THE YEAR

PRO WRESTLING TORCH 1992 YEARBOOK
EDITOR/PUBLISHER: WADE D. KELLER

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PRO WRESTLING 1992

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Pro Wrestling 1992: Pro Wrestling Torch 1992 Yearbook is published by *Pro Wrestling Torch* Weekly newsletter and editor/publisher Wade Keller. The price for the Annual through mail order including first-class postage is \$10 in the United States and Canada and \$13.50 overseas. All material herein is copyright (c) Wade Keller 1993. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be republished or reprinted in any way without the express written consent of the publisher. Any inquiries regarding subscriptions to *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* or questions or comments on this book can be sent to P.O. Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420 or by voice/fax phone to (612) 854-4274. Subscriptions to *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* are available for \$6 per four weekly issues (\$9 overseas) up to \$78 for 52 issues including auto-deductions for special issue-equivalent yearbooks and annuals. Cover photo credits: Ric Flair by Wade Keller, Brian Christopher by Jerry Wilson, Sting by Wade Keller. Photo on page 52 of Terry Funk by Wade Keller.

Welcome to the fifth annual *Torch* year-end edition. I want to begin by thanking everyone involved in the *Torch*, including the correspondents, subscribers, columnists, and everyone else who has made the last five and a half years publishing *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* and the bi-annual special books such a rewarding experience.

Last year, 1992, will be best remembered for two things—the trial and error of Bill Watts in WCW and more prominently, the WWF scandals and wave of negative publicity, forcing Hulk Hogan on sabbatical.

On the next page begins the 1992 year-in-review. The review features full-page stories on each of the top ten stories of the year completely updated as of Feb. 15, 1993, just days before the initial mailing of the yearbook. Following the features on the top ten stories is a list and summary of the rest of the "Top 50 Stories of the Year." This is the second year we have put together a list of the top 50 stories of the year. Last year's inaugural edition got a strong reaction, although with any list that long and to a large degree subjective, some disagreed with the list last year's committee came up with.

Following the list of top stories is the fifth annual *Torch* Year-End Awards. The reader comments have been cut back from last year, but a full-page of comments are still included for the "Primary 12 Awards." Hundreds of ballots were cast and compiled. Points were awarded on a 3-2-1 basis. A very special thanks to everyone who broke last year's record for number of ballots for taking time to participate in the year-end awards. After the "Primary 12" categories comes a page listing the top three finishers in the "Secondary Categories" from #13-42. I would like your feedback on the expanded quantity of categories with less space dedicated to the categories beyond the first 12.

In a new feature to the *Torch*, a list has been compiled of "1992's Ten Most Powerful People in Wrestling." The impromptu committee who put together the list were basing their votes on the power one wielded as of Dec. 31, 1992. The list, as you will gather, would be quite different already, just a few weeks into 1993. Already next year's list is shaping up to be different, with hints of possibly more changes on the horizon as the year progresses. Please send any comments or disagreements with the list to *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* for publication in "Reader Rhetoric."

In another new feature to the *Torch*, a list of the "Top 100 Wrestlers in the World" is featured. A committee of over 10 international wrestling observers put together a list of their top wrestlers. The list is obviously subjective to a great degree, but is a reflection of how the wrestling community sees the quality of working ability between wrestlers not only in the United States, but all over the world.

Bruce Mitchell returns, injecting some humor into this book, examining the year 1992 in his second annual "Year-End Wrestling Quiz." No cheating and looking at the answers before you faithfully fill in the answers on your own.

Chris Zavisa returns for his second annual in-depth review of the year in Japanese wrestling. The American wrestling scene is intertwined with the Japanese wrestling scene, although probably not to as great a degree as it should be. While the *Torch* is committed primarily to in-depth coverage and analysis of the United States wrestling scene, each month Chris Zavisa relates important happenings in Japan in the pages of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly*. He brings his vast knowledge of Japanese wrestling to the pages of this publication for his annual review and analysis of the Japan wrestling scene.

Steve Sims, editor and publisher of *Lucha Libre Weekly*, contributes an excellent three-page article reviewing the important changes that have taken place in the Mexican wrestling scene over the past year or so.

Mark Madden's "It's the End of the Business As We Know It" column follows with his theory on why wrestling in this country will not be able to make a rebound to past levels of success.

And finally, the anchor feature of this book is the first in-depth career retrospective interview ever conducted with legendary wrestler Terry Funk. The interview, conducted Jan. 30, 1993, features an in-depth fascinating look at the past, present, and future of one of wrestling's truly great men.

I hope you enjoy the yearbook. It was a big, but fulfilling effort, to put it together. So many people are to be thanked for their roles in making this possible. Your feedback is not only welcome, but encouraged. Thanks so much for your support of this book and future endeavors. -WK

THE TOP

Nineteen-ninety-two will go down in history as one of the worst years for professional wrestling ever. But 1992 could have been one of the most telling. Everyone looked for trends in 1990 that would set the pace for the rest of the decade, but 1992 showed the first signs that the way things were in the late-'80s might not last throughout the '90s.

The World Wrestling Federation faced major public relations problems throughout 1992 and saw its business drop up to 50 percent in major revenue sources such as arena attendance, television ratings, pay-per-view buyrates, and merchandising.

This year saw the temporary end of Hulkamania. Hogan's his presence 1992 year was less than any year since 1982 when he first gained national fame coming out of Rocky III. Hogan did not wrestle after Wrestlemania in April.

In 1992, World Championship Wrestling had three V.P.'s, the now infamous Jim Herd, the lamblike Kip Frey, and the unhinged Bill Watts. Watts's arrival came with a lot of fanfare, including a special mid-week edition of *Pro Wrestling Torch* devoted to explaining why Watts could be the savior. By the end of 1992, Watts had unearned most of the respect he had coming in to his job by the fans, wrestlers, and media.

One of the most significant events could be the rise of Jim Cornette's Smoky Mountain Wrestling. Cornette fulfilled the dreams of many old-time fans who dreamed of attempts to revive territories. By the end of 1992, Cornette had moderate, but surprising, momentum on his side with plans to be running full time by the mid-point of 1993.

The success of SMW, the late-1992 upturn in the USWA, and the small-scale survival of literally dozens of other independent regional promotions around the country left hope in many traditionalists that wrestling the way it used to be would return.

But there is no question that in 1992, most major stories circled around the WWF and WCW—mainly their drop in business and behind-the-scenes turmoil. It is on that note that we revisit what was dubbed "TitanGate," 1992's number one story.

A feature is written on each of the top ten stories, followed a brief summary of nos. 11-50. "The Top 50 Stories of 1992" list was compiled by *Pro Wrestling Torch* editor Wade Keller, the *Torch* editorial staff and several other wrestling journalists and wrestlers.

STORIES OF 1992

WWF Scandals Dominate Early-1992 News

There is no possible way to either explain everything that happened or determine what the long-term effects will be of all of the WWF scandals collectively dubbed "TitanGate."

The trial of Dr. George Zahorian in the Summer of 1991 first alerted the media to pro wrestling's steroid problem. When Zahorian was found guilty on 12 counts of unlawful sale and distribution of steroids, when it was revealed in the trial that the FBI was involved in prosecuting Zahorian, when several wrestlers testified about the steroid problem in wrestling, and when Hulk Hogan was excused from having to testify at the Zahorian trial, the foundation was set for a growing mainstream media interest in the WWF. Alex Marvez of the *Miami Herald* was the first to write about it in a mainstream newspaper with a front page story on the sports section June 24, 1991.

The media began to investigate. As various journalists investigated, interviewing wrestlers and former wrestlers such as Billy Graham, David Shults, Billy Jack Haynes, Barry Orton, and others, amazing stories were told.

March 11 is when the volcano erupted and the scandals spewed into the living rooms of newspaper readers, television viewers, and radio listeners across the country. For two weeks, the mainstream media coverage was relentless. The Mar. 11 *San Diego Tribune* headlined on the front page with an 80-inch story on TitanGate, the first of several front-page *Tribune* stories by Jeff Savage that week. The *Los Angeles Times* featured a front-page story Mar. 12 on TitanGate. The *Oregonian* on Mar. 12, *People* magazine on Mar. 13, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on Mar. 16, and other newspapers revealed previously untold allegations.

The allegations focused on Vince McMahon, Hulk Hogan, Pat Patterson, and Terry Garvin.

Patterson and Garvin were accused of demanding sex from male wrestlers in exchange for pushes or jobs. Hogan was accused of using steroids illegally for years and lying about it. McMahon was accused of nothing (yet) other than knowingly tolerating what the above did.

The most prominent journalist, who was involved from the beginning until present, is Phil Mushnick, sports columnist for the *New York Post* and 1992's *Village Voice* "Sportswriter of

[illegible]

the Year." He began writing about the WWF scandals Jan. 9, 1992 and has yet to stop.

Mushnick, in his usual strong editorial style, ripped into Hogan, WWF head Vince McMahon, Pat Patterson, and others. He even ripped into the mainstream media for not covering the scandals.

For example, in the Mar. 16 *New York Post*, Mushnick wrote: "The WWF is powerdrunk in the knowledge that its autonomy fully enables it to violate every standard of human decency because right-headed humans possess neither the time nor the inclination to do anything about an industry they've always viewed with bemused disregard. Never will you encounter a human more cold-blooded, more devoid of honor and propriety than Vince McMahon, America's foremost babysitter. In your wildest, most twisted dreams, you won't meet up with the likes of McMahon, a miscreant so practiced in the art of deception, the half-truth, and the bald-faced lie as to make the Artful Dodger appear clumsy. A George Steinbrenner or a Don King pale by comparison. So help us. Indeed. Hannibal Lecter is the only fictional character who comes close."

The favorite accuser for the broadcast media was Murray Hodgson, an applicant for an announcing position with the WWF who claimed Patterson told him unless he had sex

with him, he would not get the job as WWF announcer.

Hodgson appeared on "Donahue" Mar. 16 to tell his story. Others on the show included Dave Meltzer of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, John Azezzi of New York's "Pro Wrestling Spotlight" radio show, Superstar Billy Graham, Bruno Sammartino, and Vince McMahon.

Three days earlier, McMahon did whatever it took to work his way through an interview with Larry King. King promised to continue coverage of TitanGate in future weeks, yet never again touched the story.

Tabloid TV shows, wrestling radio shows, wrestling newsletters, mainstream magazines and newspapers, and even Johnny Carson and David Letterman in their monologues continued to keep the WWF's scandals in the public's eye.

Hulk Hogan got out while he could and retired from wrestling, albeit without a formal declaration or much fanfare, and lied low as the media coverage subsided.

The week of Wrestlemania, Rita Chatterton, a former WWF referee, alleged Vince McMahon equated her having sex with him to her keeping her job. Chatterton made the allegations on the nationally syndicated "Now It Can Be Told" on Apr. 3, two days before Wrestlemania.

Not until the end of July when *Penthouse* published a major article did any more stories run on TitanGate. The media tired of TitanGate. Vince McMahon and Titan Sports escaped with their business still in tact. However, it was well-known in inner-circles in wrestling that many in the WWF were worried throughout the scandal coverage that the WWF would be driven out of business.

However, as the next page illustrates, all was not saved. Not only did business nose-dive in almost every major revenue area for the WWF, but WWF management still have the pleasure of knowing the U.S. Justice Department is investigating them, likely regarding some or all of the allegations revealed during the March media blitz.

Pat Patterson, who along with Garvin resigned during the scandals, returned to the WWF at the end of August. Patterson resumed his role as head booker. It was business as usual, again.

2

U.S. BUSINESS NOSE-DIVES

Record-Lows Set in TV Ratings, Buyrates, Attendance

The WWF's average attendance at the beginning of 1992 was 6,580*. By the end of 1992, average attendance was a mere 3,210. WCW fared no better, beginning the year at a dismal 2,120 and ending at a grave 930.

Television ratings dropped from a 2.50 for the WWF to 2.15 and WCW's dropped from a 2.70 to 2.17. Buyrates also took major drops, around 50 percent lower than just one year earlier.

The year saw a greater nose-dive in revenue than any year in recent history. There is no one explanation for why the wrestling business took a crash course in turning away customers. TitanGate, Hulk Hogan retiring, overexposure on TV, transition of leadership, and bad booking could be considered major reasons.

WCW's problems could be attributed mostly to an inferior product compared to previous years. WCW entered 1992 without Ric Flair, who had left the promotion six months earlier, but also without anyone who stepped up to fill his shoes. Sting was the number one contender and number one babyface. Lex Luger tried to fill Flair's role as the number one heel and World Champion. Neither had the presence, in-ring ability, interview ability, or overall appeal of Flair.

WCW did not respond to what ahead of time looked to be a pivotal year with a renewed commitment to hard work in the ring, sensible and fresh storylines, and a strong consistent booking philosophy.

WCW began the year with a step in the direction of change. Jim Herd was fired Jan. 8 and replaced by a young, ambitious TBS executive with little knowledge of or background in wrestling, Kip Allen Frey.

Frey quickly became a favorite of a lot of wrestlers as he was liberal with long term, high paying contracts. He treated wrestlers as valuable professional athletes and employees of TBS rather than the long standing tradition of treating wrestlers as expendable free-agents. The new attitude toward wrestlers was supposed to be an inspiration for wrestlers to work harder in the ring and for the company.

Frey did issue a steroid policy Feb. 21, but rather than punish wrestlers for taking steroids, the main devise for changing steroid habits was

*statistics courtesy the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*

The image shows the cover of the 'PRO WRESTLING TORCH' magazine. The main headline is 'THE STATE OF WRESTLING COMPARING THE FUTURES OF THE WWF AND WCW'. There is a photo of a wrestler, likely Hulk Hogan, on the cover. The magazine is dated 'JAN 1992' and 'VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1'. The cover also mentions 'THE STUNNER' and 'STIFFS'.

offering bonus pay if one passed the tests.

At his first pay-per-view, a new beginning was set as the light-heavyweight division was featured Feb. 29 at SuperBrawl as Brian Pillman defeated Jushin Liger for the light heavyweight title, plus Sting beat the departing Lex Luger for the WCW Title, Rick Rude pinned Rick Steamboat, and Bobby Eaton & Arn Anderson beat Rick & Scott Steiner. The event was considered an artistic success, averaging a 7.3 score in the *Torch* readers' METAnalysis poll.

However, despite some signs of the product improving, some changes did not go as well and eventually some wrestlers were saying that Kip Frey, for all of his friendliness and sincere wish to improve WCW, did not have the wrestling background necessary to sift through the good and bad advice offered to him.

May 12, Bill Watts was hired and Kip Frey's role diminished. Several weeks later, Frey was reassigned outside of WCW. Meanwhile, Watts was more effective at upsetting wrestling and causing political turmoil than increasing business. In fact, attendance, buyrates, and TV ratings dropped under Watts's leadership compared to Frey and Herd.

The WWF's drop in business could be attributed in large part to the retirement of Hulk Hogan. During March, when Hulk Hogan was wrestling at some house shows and was featured on all

television shows, average attendance was 6,690. After Hogan's retirement, attendance dropped to an average of 3,570 in April. April was also in the midst of the TitanGate publicity.

Another reason that could be attributed to the drop in business for the WWF is the overall decrease in size of their wrestlers. The WWF was forced into getting serious about steroid testing this year, and that testing led to a decrease in size. With the wrestlers no longer being larger than life and near a competitive bodybuilding level, perhaps many fans were no longer attracted to wrestling.

The nose-dive in overall interest in wrestling was also caused partially by snowball effects. As syndicated television ratings dropped, the WWF and WCW programs were cancelled in many markets. In other markets, the TV timeslots moved from morning, afternoon, and early evening to midnight or later. As this occurred, there was much less non-cable interest in wrestling; syndicated programming is most influential on house show attendance, especially for the WWF. Also, as attendance dropped, the morale of wrestlers dropped. As pay decreased and wrestlers performed in front of smaller crowds, it was apparent that incentive to work hard on some nights was absent.

The *Wrestling Observer*, in combining the three major statistics, measured the drop in overall fan interest from Jan. to Nov. in the WWF at 45.9 percent and in WCW's at 41.4%.

Meanwhile, the independent scene held steady. It was weak coming into 1992 and showed no major trends by the end of the year, other than a late-December temporary surge in attendance, although SMW was a pleasant surprise

As 1993 began, both the WWF and WCW were searching for a winning formula. As was apparent at the Royal Rumble, the WWF was going to build around Curt Hennig and Bret Hart on the babyface side and Lex Luger, Yokozuna, and Razor Ramon on the heel side. WCW, meanwhile, was awaiting the return of Ric Flair, who along with Sting, Cactus Jack, and Dustin Rhodes would be the main babyfaces and Rick Rude, Barry Windham, and Steve Austin would be the main heels.

There will continue to be changes in 1993 to try to the nose-dive into a sharp rise.

3

BILL WATTS HIRED BY WCW

Replaces Kip Allen Frey As WCW Vice President

Bill Watts, regarded at the time as the only possible savior of WCW, was hired May 11, replacing Kip Allen Frey. Watts, as vice president in charge of wrestling operations, was hired because he has a successful track record. He was fired Feb. 10, 1993 because he could not live up to that track record.

"I'm very excited," Watts said in a "Torch Talk" conducted May 14, days after being hired. "I guess I've always liked the wrestling challenge. I haven't watched much wrestling or anything else lately, but I've got a great love for wrestling and the tradition that is wrapped around it."

"As far as I'm concerned, with Turner Enterprises and WTBS here, they should be setting the standard for the industry. They should have their own clear-cut identity. I think they have all the people. They've got great talent, a tremendous staff that loves the business and everything else."

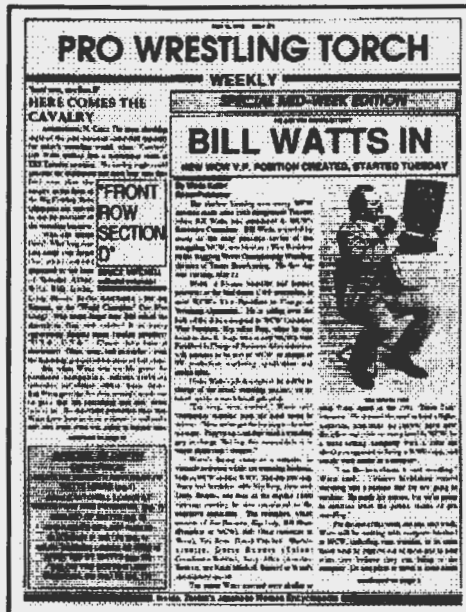
"We're going to start selling out arena venues, starting with the Omni. My gosh, the Omni is our Madison Square Garden... If you get back to the basics where you build the arenas and reestablish your credibility with the fans, that's going to build ratings and other sales. It all builds together."

There was tremendous enthusiasm for Watts's hiring by wrestlers and fans alike. However, Watts's honeymoon ended when he banned moves off the top rope. While talking about how he was in favor of a strong light-heavyweight division, he showed he was out of touch with what makes that division most exciting. Watts also removed mats from ringside because "WCW has real men who land on cement."

He also backed out of his commitment to pay wrestlers while injured, even as recently as January 1993 when Rick Rude was out with an injury.

In the May 14 interview with the *Torch* three days after he was hired, Watts said, "If a guy gets hurt, I have no problem with him being compensated because he was being hurt in an endeavor for this company. I would take exception to a guy who's not hurt that bad and him milking that advantage which can be done."

Watts wrote memos to wrestlers, talking about how in the olden days, wrestlers used to show up



for their scheduled dates no matter what their condition because they were part of a team. However, the football coach mentality did not go over well with the wrestlers, who wanted to be treated as professional adult athletes, not high school kids.

Watts also attempted to strong-arm several WCW employees out of their existing guaranteed contracts to try to cut back on WCW's payroll. He was successful in cutting back on the payroll, buying out Jimmy Garvin for a lump sum of money and driving away Rick & Scott Steiner. However, his tactics behind the scenes with Brian Pillman, Paul E. Dangerously, Rick Rude, Sting, and others to varying extents, caused turmoil behind the scenes and an overall resentment for his leadership tactics.

Watts immediately made some changes that the average fan would notice. Van Vader defeated Sting for the WCW World Title in July. Aug. 2 in Baltimore, in the highlight of Watts's first weeks at WCW, Jake Roberts debuted by attacking Sting and eliminating him from his title rematch later that night. Then, in a drawing, Simmons won the right to face Vader for the belt and defeated him to become WCW Champion.

Partially, giving the title to Simmons could have been an attempt to offset criticism aimed at wrestling promoters who have rarely pushed black wrestlers without a degrading gimmick.

Watts may have also been attempting to directly offset some of the comment he made in the *Torch* Annual IV a year earlier, comments which eventually were part of his downfall.

"It should be that, by god, if you're going to open your doors in America you can discriminate," Watts said. "Why the f—k not? That's why I went into business, so I could discriminate! I mean, really. I mean I want to be able to sell to who I want to and be able to serve who I want to. It's my business, it's my investment. So they come in and say no, I can't tell a fag to get the f—k out. I should have the right not to associate with a fag if I want to. I mean, why should I have to hire a f—kin' fag if I don't like fags. Fags discriminate against us... Do Blacks discriminate against Whites? Who's killed more Blacks than anyone? The f—kin' Blacks..."

"What's the best thing that ever happened to the Black race? That they were brought to this country. No matter how they got here, they were brought here... Lester Maddox was right. If I don't want to sell fried chicken to Blacks, I shouldn't have to. It's my restaurant. Hell, at least I respect him for his stand. This doesn't make me anti-Black... I've got a lot of Black friends. A lot of Blacks I respect. There are a lot of Blacks where I am their fan. I think they're fabulous. Not only as athletes. But I think they should have the right to discriminate and I should have the right to discriminate."

By the end of the year, although the television product had gotten better, Watts had not increased business. In fact, the five months Frey was in charge, the average paid attendance was 2,200 (\$23,260 house). After just over five months of Bill Watts's leadership, average paid attendance was 1,594 (\$14,158 house). Frey's average TV rating was 2.4 and Watts's was 2.0.

Watts had over six months to build up to and promote Starrcade, more than the amount of time he predicted he would need to show some increase in fan interest in WCW, yet Starrcade's buyrate dropped from 1.0 in 1991 to 0.5 in 1992. With the expanded universe of homes, the revenue stayed about the same, so the blow to the buyrate was more easily absorbed.

By mid-February 1993, Bob Dhue and Bill Shaw demoted Watts and days later he resigned.

After Wrestlemania, Hogan Disappears From Scene

5

WWF SUCCEEDS IN EUROPE

Outlet Found to Offset Some of United States Woes

As business in the United States dropped to record low levels, the WWF found a new market willing to pay in the masses to see its product—Europe.

The WWF television shows and pay-per-views were popular programming on satellite. WWF videos sold well in Europe, as did souvenir merchandise.

And when they took the show live to Europe in April 1991, the arenas filled. Most were sell-outs. When the WWF returned to Europe for SummerSlam and a second week-long tour, there was no indication the WWF-mania was subsiding.

With average WWF crowds in the United States dropping from 6,000 to 3,000 in 1992, selling out the majority of events in Europe was a boost to WWF revenues. It also helped rejuvenate the wrestlers who were affected negatively by performing in front of small crowds in the United States most nights.

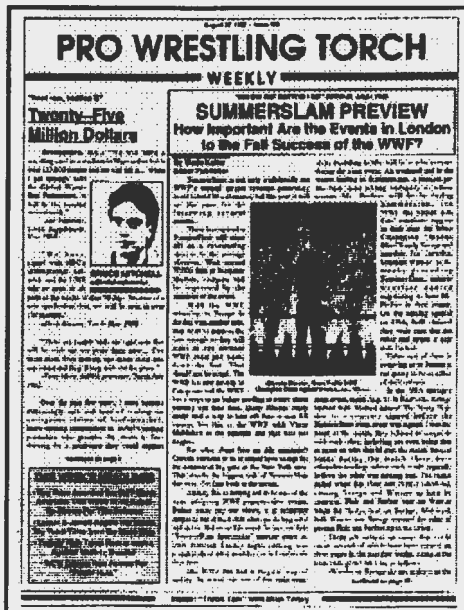
The WWF was able to sell out the majority of the events on the first tour with a split crew, running two events per night. Apr. 13 and 14 in London at Wembley Arena, the WWF drew sellouts with the two gates totalling \$600,000. The souvenir sales were also tremendous, almost equalling the \$260,000 gates in Munich, Germany Apr. 14.

The events were far from marquee line-ups. For instance, in Munich, Bret Hart pinned Dino Bravo, Jim Duggan beat Col. Mustafa, Repoman pinned Sgt. Slaughter, Papa Shango pinned Tito Santana, Randy Savage pinned Shawn Michaels, Legion of Doom & British Bulldog beat The Nasty Boys & The Mountie, and British Bulldog won a battle royal.

Ultimate Warrior vs. Jake "The Snake" Roberts was supposed to headline one of the shows each night. Neither wrestler appeared, which left Undertaker vs. Sid Justice as the replacement main event on one show while British Bulldog and Bret Hart were the top names on the other.

Without Hulk Hogan, and despite the enormous popularity of Ultimate Warrior in Europe, the true superstar in the fans' eyes was British Bulldog.

That was never more evident than at SummerSlam when an announced crowd of 80,355 packed the outdoor Wembley Stadium to



see British Bulldog pin Bret Hart to win the Intercontinental Title in a classic 25 minute bout. Bulldog put on his best performance in years, ever since gaining incredible muscle mass.

The festive atmosphere was a dream for Vince McMahon. The fans ate up the WWF histrionics as if they were all paid plants reacting just as the promotion's management imagined.

The gate for SummerSlam was in excess of \$2.5 million and one of the top ten all-time best gates for professional wrestling.

The tours were so successful, WCW soon began to make their own plans to tour Europe. Their first tour will be in early 1993.

The WWF, however, will have more of a challenge in 1993 drawing in Europe because British Bulldog left the WWF and joined WCW.

WCW has better television exposure in Europe, and with the addition of British Bulldog and Ric Flair, both of whom headlined for the WWF on the WWF's first tour, it is almost guaranteed sellout crowds and massive profits.

The WWF will have to get by without Bulldog and Flair and hope Lex Luger, Undertaker, Yokozuna, Bret Hart, and Curt Hennig can garner enough mainstream interest in Europe to make it a success.

Because of the prosperity the WWF had in Europe, not only did WCW plan a tour, but

many other promoters talked about promoting a full-time American-style circuit in Europe. However, the novelty of a third group running shows with, as far as the fans are concerned, third-rate talent might wear thin quickly.

However, the possibility of either WCW or the WWF committing to running more than periodical tours in Europe is a possibility, especially if attendance does not pick up in the United States.

Not only is wrestling in Europe virtually guaranteed to draw large enough crowds to more than make up for increased airfare and other expenses, but by virtue of being in Europe, there will be fewer house shows in the United States burning out fans. If WCW or the WWF ran a week's worth of events in Europe six times per year or more, and in exchange cut out some of the money-losing events that are promoted in this country, not only would the promotions cut losses and actually make profit on arena shows, but they could afford to cut back on more of the arena shows that are money losers and give wrestlers time off.

The intangible is the benefit to the image of the WWF when a sellout crowd of over 80,000 is broadcast in the United States. Such an image gives the impression to U.S. fans who believe wrestling is no longer cool that the WWF is indeed as big as it once was.

WCW could benefit from such a boost in reputation also, and selling out Wembley Stadium for a pay-per-view in 1993 is not out of the question, especially if British Bulldog were to challenge WCW Champion Big Van Vader or NWA Champion Barry Windham.

What the WWF's success in Europe did most to benefit this country's wrestling scenes was provide an alternative source of revenue when business was worse than most in either major promotion believed was possible.

In 1993, the two major promotions need to walk the fine line between meeting the enormous demand for pro wrestling in Europe and burning out the fans too early through overexposure and bad matches. A promotion which walks that line can make a lot of money in 1993.

With Ric Flair and British Bulldog, WCW has potential to be the leader in Europe.

6

SMW STARTS AND SURVIVES

Jim Cornette Starts Old-Style Territory from Scratch

Jim Cornette, frustrated with the way the two national promotions were presenting pro wrestling, surpassed big money with the major promotions and decided to start his own promotion in a familiar part of the country for him—Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

"It seemed to me there was tremendous potential out there to not only make a lot of money, but to do something that I enjoy doing," Cornette said in an Aug. 13 "Torch Talk."

Thus was born Smoky Mountain Wrestling, based out of Morristown, Tenn., which by the end of 1992 was an established regional promotion running a semi-full-time schedule.

Cornette, with a financial backer providing the necessary funds, started slowly, building a network of syndicated shows.

"It's been slower than I thought it was going to be," Cornette said looking back on 1992. "Everybody, I think, has underestimated how much people hate wrestling these days. It doesn't have to be that way. It's taken a while, and we've finally got credibility and finally people are looking at our stuff saying, 'Yeah, that's the good stuff.'"

"Another thing is the whole business went into a slump and the economy isn't the best, so people aren't spending money like they used to. I look at it as a positive that even with all the points against us, we've been able to get the credibility and we've still been able to triple and quadruple our attendance from when we started out. We've been able to expand our schedule and sell our souvenirs. Added to all the good things people have said about us, that, to me, means more than if we had started and had been successful when wrestling was booming."

After promoting successful Thanksgiving and Christmas tours, drawing over 4,000 fans over three nights for each tour, Cornette has bigger goals for 1993.

"In 1993, we'd like to be running five or six days a week," Cornette said. "A regular territory with all of our shows making some money in the same territory we are in now, give or take a few TV markets, is the goal."

SMW has received rave reviews from fans of old-style wrestling. Although it is modernized

somewhat, watching SMW TV is like travelling back in time. Some of the fans SMW draws might not be aware of exactly what year it is. While the match quality is at times excellent, but the angles have been Cornette's forté as booker.

The question many have asked is whether SMW's success can be duplicated elsewhere.

"I think that basically what we do have is great talent," Cornette said. "We have a great area of the country where people like wrestling and that people can be lured back to wrestling again. We have a tremendously understanding and supportive (financial) backer. And we've got people that I think know what we're trying to do with this. Yet, still, we make mistakes. It's very hard, but I don't see why (a territory like SMW) couldn't be done elsewhere. Especially at this time and in this climate in the wrestling business, you need the combination of everything to make it."

One of the roadblocks to SMW being the start of a national trend is not just whether anyone has the combination of money, wrestling knowledge, and the patience of Cornette, but also whether they could get television clearances in whatever area they chose to promote.

"Getting television was definitely the hardest part so far," Cornette said. "Wrestling's not hot anymore. It's not doing ratings like it used to. The TV stations don't know why other wrestling

doesn't draw ratings. It's an uphill battle to show them you have a different product than what they have tried and failed with in the past. I found that once we do, the stations love us and they're nice to us. It's like joining a private club. Once you join, everyone loves you, but it's tough to break the door down."

According to Cornette, based on the calls and letters from wrestlers seeking work, a new territory would not have trouble gathering a solid roster.

"I knew it would be easy to get good talent," Cornette said. "There are so many guys the big groups don't want or haven't signed them yet or are pissed off at them."

SMW has been popular because, while its workrate or the talent of the wrestlers was never on par with Japanese wrestling, SMW has been solid in virtually every area of promoting. Perhaps the weakest area during 1992 for SMW was having a strong singles babyface wrestler.

Brian Lee, who was SMW Heavyweight Champion between reigns by Dirty White Boy, was the number one babyface, but never showed the charisma behind the microphone or in the ring to be a true leader. Luckily, the Rock & Roll Express, legendary in the SMW area, were around the latter part of the year to pick up the slack.

As far as heels went, SMW had no shortage. Late in the year, Kevin Sullivan added his name to an impressive list including Jim Cornette, The Heavenly Bodies (Stan Lane & Tom Prichard), Dirty White Boy, Paul Orndorff, and the improving Nightstalker.

SMW in 1993 should continue to have a cult following, but it is consistent interest in the SMW areas that is the key to SMW's survival. Cornette hopes to gain that interest by continuing to improve, but doesn't think there is one major area where surgery is needed.

"We have room for improvement in almost every area," said Cornette. "I don't think there's been one glaring spot where we really stunk. I don't think, and no one has brought up to us either, there is one area where we are horrifyingly, glaringly inadequate, but there's room for improvement in almost everything we do."

7

WWF EXODUS OF MUSCLES

Hogan, Justice, Legion of Doom, Warrior, Smith Gone

Sid Justice's disappearance would be easy to explain. He has been erratically moving from one promotion to his local softball league to another promotion and back to softball.

But Justice, Ultimate Warrior, Hawk, Animal, Davey Boy Smith, Hulk Hogan, Kerry Von Erich, Warlord, Barbarian, and Chris Walker are collectively more than a coincidence.

That list represents wrestlers who were in the World Wrestling Federation before the steroid scandal hit the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*. The list represents the core of what Vince McMahon called the best in wholesome family sports entertainment.

Now, except for the recent arrival of Lex Luger and the Steiners, there is not one wrestler in the WWF larger than any of those men. And Luger and the Steiners are recent arrivals who have yet to be scrutinized by the WWF's surprisingly effective steroid tests.

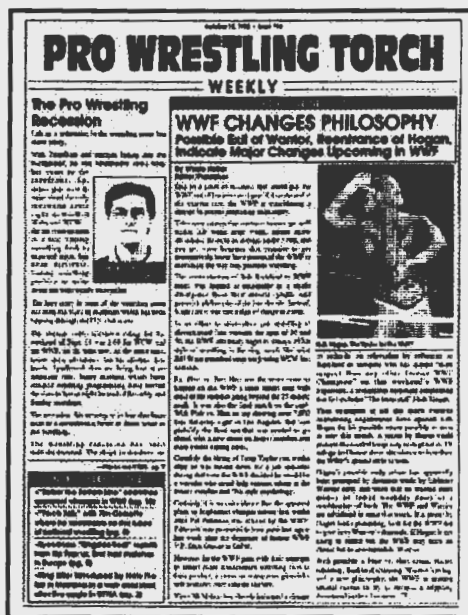
There is no question that the media pressure got to the WWF, not to mention pressure from the government getting involved, including a search of a St. Louis, Mo. locker room Feb. 14.

One wrestler told the press that he was in a WWF locker room in Texas at a TV taping when Vince McMahon told the wrestlers he was not going to cover for them anymore when it came to steroid use.

That became apparent in the latter part of 1992 when, with a rare exception, there did not appear to be any grotesque use of steroids. By the end of 1992, everyone of questionable size was gone. Certainly average looking physiques remaining in the WWF could still be enhanced by steroids, but the longtime main issue is gone.

That main issue, the one that caused the mainstream and wrestling media to criticize Vince McMahon, was the belief that in the WWF there were a certain number of spots reserved for wrestlers who were unnaturally muscular. That meant that certain wrestlers were getting jobs over others because they were willing to take steroids. It just happened that those select spots reserved for muscular wrestlers were also usually paired with a title belt and a big push.

By the end of 1992, the average-sized Bret Hart



was WWF Champion, the average sized Shawn Michaels was Intercontinental Champion, and the averaged sized Ted DiBiase & Mike Rotunda were WWF Tag Team Champions.

Not only was the aforementioned list of wrestlers completely gone from the WWF, but other wrestlers expected to be hired because of their enhanced size were not hired, such as "The Patriot" Del Wilkes.

The WWF had been teasing the media and its wrestlers for months about getting serious about steroid testing. When the trial of Dr. George Zahorian first hit the press, McMahon said that the WWF had been testing for drugs for years and that steroid testing was now part of the WWF's routine. However, after only having two tests in the six months following that announcement, the mainstream media was alerted and soon the negative press reports began. The second test appeared to be prompted by "Entertainment Tonight" doing another story on the steroid problem in wrestling, specifically the WWF's lack of testing despite promises.

Finally, what began as a joke, turned into an apparently steroid program. Wrestlers began to get suspended for what the WWF confidentially called "unprofessional conduct," but at times likely translated into "failing a steroid test."

Part of "WWF Exodus of Muscles" being the

seventh biggest story of the year is the failure of the WWF's sister company, the WBF, run by Titan Sports owner Vince McMahon.

McMahon, forever a fan of bodybuilding, decided that there was money to be made in professional bodybuilding. The only person currently promoting bodybuilding was Joe Weider, who McMahon likened to Verne Gagne as an outdated, ready-to-be-defeated competitor.

McMahon began signing top bodybuilders from Weider's group to guaranteed money—large sums of money. This angered many WWF wrestlers, knowing that the money the bodybuilders were being paid came from wrestling gates. They were also angered because they were not given guaranteed salaries and few, if any, were making the type of money McMahon was signing bodybuilders to. Especially infuriating to several wrestlers was that the bodybuilders were paid to do what they would love to do themselves—working out in the gym for hours every day without the need to travel, earn big money, and take steroids.

The WBF attempted to run a weekly program on USA Network. It got on the air, but so few watched that soon the WWF was paying USA to air the program. It essentially became "paid programming," equivalent to half-hour long commercials for the "The Juicer."

McMahon held a WBF pay-per-view and it flopped, with the purchases nationally barely reaching four figures. The WBF folded.

The failure of the WBF along with the outside pressures to legitimately test WWF wrestlers and not reserve several spots for unnaturally muscular wrestlers ended up eliminating most of what the mainstream media found so appalling.

WCW spent most of the year ignoring the problem. Kip Frey's WCW steroid testing policy was forgotten soon after Bill Watts gained control of WCW. Perhaps, though, WCW has not and will not approach the extreme steroid abuse of the WWF two years ago, and thus will not attract the type of media and governmental scrutiny the WWF did in 1992.

One positive result from TitanGate is that there is less pressure to take steroids in 1993 than 1991. Score one point for future wrestlers.

8

BUDDY ROGERS DIES

One of Pro Wrestling's All-Time Biggest Names Dies

"Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers died June 26 at Holy Cross Hospital in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Rogers, 71, wrestled 24 years, including a reign as NWA World Champion from June 1961 to May 1963. Rogers, born Herman Rhode, was the original "Nature Boy."

"In his era, he was the greatest attraction there was and a terrific performer," six-time former NWA Champion Lou Thesz told the *Torch*. "He was the best immediate box office draw we had during a 20 year period."

Rogers kept himself in tremendous physical shape. Retired and living in Florida, he jogged the beaches regularly.

Rogers broke his arm several weeks before his death. While going through rehabilitation he lost 20 pounds and suffered a mild stroke. The morning of June 22, while showering, he suffered a major stroke. His wife called 911 and he was taken to the hospital. While in the hospital that day, he suffered a third stroke, blinding and paralyzing him. He lapsed into a coma and never recovered.

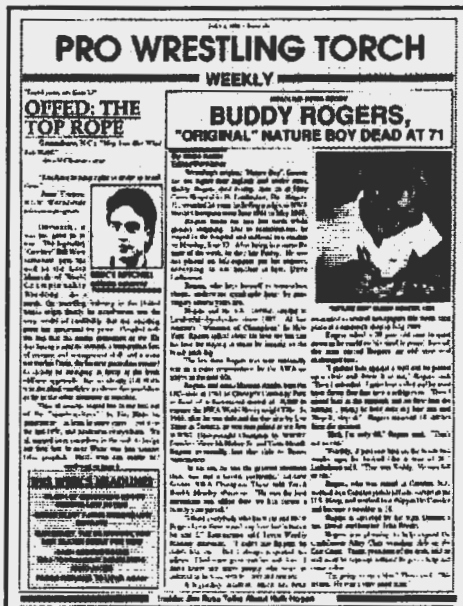
Rogers was considered one of the true innovators of the sport of professional wrestling, including being the first flamboyant, strutting, bleached blond heel with serious negative fan heat. Ric Flair would later pattern his heel persona after Rogers.

"I don't know too many people who were as colorful as he was, with his strut and persona," Bruno Sammartino told the *Torch*.

Rogers also first made popular the figure-four leglock, which Flair would also duplicate in his in-ring work. In fact, Flair and Ray Stevens patterned their in-ring work entirely around Rogers early in their careers and both developed into highly respected workers.

Rogers was a respected worker by the promoters, but was also considered a tough businessperson. Rogers flexed his political muscles at times and was partially responsible for the formation of the WWF, which eventually became simply the WWF.

Thesz beat Rogers in a one-fall match Jan. 24, 1963 in Toronto to win the NWA Title. However, promoters in the Northeast did not



want Thesz as their champion, so they continued to recognize Rogers as champion, dubbing him the WWF Champion. Rogers suffered a heart attack in 1963. May 17 of that year he lost the WWF Title to Bruno Sammartino at Madison Square Garden in 47 seconds. The match was kept short due to Rogers's still weak heart.

Rogers wrestled sparingly for two more years. He came back briefly in 1987 in Florida. He managed Jimmy Snuka in the WWF in 1982 and wrestled in tag team matches with Snuka against Lou Albano & Ray Stevens.

Rogers was going to wrestle in January of 1992 and become the second wrestler to have wrestled professionally in seven different decades, but the TWA event promoted by Joel Goodhart was cancelled because Goodhart folded the TWA. Rogers's scheduled opponent was Buddy Landell.

Rogers first won the NWA World Heavyweight Title June 30, 1961 in front of 38,622 fans (\$148,000) in Chicago, Ill. at Comisky Park. Rogers defeated ultra-clean babyface Pat O'Connor in O'Connors's hometown. The rematch several months later at Comisky drew around 30,000.

Rogers, because he was willing to flex his political muscles, did not get along well with either Thesz or Sammartino during the years all

three wrestled.

"I think everybody who knew me and knew Rogers knew there wasn't any love lost between he and I," Sammartino said. "I didn't like Rogers, he didn't like me. But I always respected his talents. I had some great matches with him."

Thesz told the *Wrestling Observer*: "He wasn't a wrestler (shooter), but he knew how to work and he knew how to draw money and he knew how to book. When you draw money, everyone will deal with you even when they don't like you because there really are so few who can really draw money. He was the top performer of my time, in a class by himself. He could do a lot of things that the rest of the guys wouldn't even try."

Rogers last appeared nationally on television in 1987 for the AWA on ESPN as a color commentator. He last appeared publicly at a wrestling-related event in August 1991 at John Arezzi's "Weekend of Champions" wrestling convention in New York. He was healthy and vigorous, talking about his love for life, love for staying in shape, and love for his wife.

An amusing incident in 1989 involving Rogers was reported by several newspapers. Rogers, at the time, was reported, asked a 29 year old man in a restaurant to lower his voice so he could eat in peace. Instead of complying, the man called Rogers an old man and challenged him.

"I pushed him against a wall and he picked up a chair and threw it at me," Rogers said. "Then I unloaded. I gave him a shot and he must have flown five feet into a refrigerator. Then I nailed him in the stomach and he flew into the kitchen... [then] he held onto my hair and said 'Stop it, stop it.'" Rogers received 14 stitches from the incident.

"Hell. I'm 68," Rogers said. "That's not so old."

Rogers, who was raised in Camden, N.J., worked as a Camden police officer, served in the U.S. Navy, and worked in a shipyard in Camden before becoming a pro wrestler at age 18.

Rogers was survived by his wife, Debbie; a son, David; and brother John Rhode.

Rogers's final activity in wrestling was as part of the "Cauliflower Alley Club" run by Thesz.

9

FLAIR WINS WWF TITLE TWICE

Goes 60 Minutes At Rumble to Win First WWF Belt

The *Torch* headline story that week began: "Ric Flair, unable to hold back his smile, declared it the greatest moment of his life. For a seven-time NWA World Heavyweight Champion, that is saying quite a bit."

That is saying a lot, but Flair outlasted 29 wrestlers on his way to winning the "Royal Rumble" and capturing his first WWF Title.

It wasn't just that he won the event. It was how he did it. It was like a one-hour long slam dunk, a one-hour long break-away goal, and a one-hour long grand slam in the 9th inning. Unlike Bob Backlund's recent 60-plus minute stint in the 1993 Royal Rumble, Flair didn't stop moving, rarely looked winded, took excellent bumps, and was always in the middle of the action. Thanks in part to Flair's performance, the Royal Rumble pay-per-view received a 100 percent positive rating from *Torch* readers, averaging an 8.0 out of 10.0 on the META scale.

Some of the magic was not knowing Flair was going to win ahead of time. There was still apprehension that Vince McMahon, who for years courted Flair to enter the WWF, would not give Flair the respect or stature he received in his years in WCW.

Flair, the third entrant in the Rumble, tumbled over the top rope onto the ring apron several times, but never onto the cement floor below. Flair's entrance was preceded by British Bulldog and Ted DiBiase, but DiBiase was eliminated immediately, so Flair battled Bulldog for two minutes. Flair also battled Kerry Von Erich in a renewal of a classic feud from the World Class era. Flair battled Valentine in a renewal of Mid-Atlantic days. Flair disposed of both Bulldog and Von Erich. Flair also eliminated Big Bossman, but soon after was attacked by fresh entrant Roddy Piper. The two battled alone in the ring until Jake Roberts complicated the situation. The same man who Flair helped win the WWF Title from Hogan, The Undertaker, then attacked Flair. Moments later, Flair locked up with Rick Martel. Flair was NWA Champion during much of Martel's AWA Title reign.

Hogan entered the ring 26th and quickly knocked Undertaker's and Flair's heads together. Hogan then picked up Flair and tossed him over the top rope, but Flair landed on the apron and rolled back into the ring. Slaughter,

PRO WRESTLING TORCH
WEEKLY

FLAIR GOES 60 MINUTES TO WIN WWF TITLE
HOGAN AND JUSTICE SQUARE OFF AFTER MATCH, JUSTICE CHIEFED

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES

VENTURING TO DEBUT FOR
WOW AT CLASH

WRESTLING REVEALS
HART'S 14 TITLE LOSS
BUT HE OCCURS

EATON & ANDERSON
CAPTURE WOW TAG TEAM
TITLE

DOOHART'S TWA FOLDS

THE TORCH is a weekly publication that covers the world of professional wrestling. It is published weekly, except for a few issues that are published bi-weekly. The publication is known for its in-depth coverage of the wrestling industry, including news, rumors, and analysis. It is a must-read for anyone who is interested in professional wrestling.

28th, charged the ring and battled Flair. Sid Justice entered 29th and the two former Horsemen exchanged blows.

The final three competitors, Hogan, Justice, and Flair battled, ending in a symbolic masterpiece, as Flair eliminated Justice to become the winner. Justice, who entered as a babyface, eliminated Hogan from behind, and while gloating over his deed, Flair shoved him over the top rope.

"I'm gonna tell ya with a tear in my eye, this is the greatest moment in my life," said Flair in a post-match interview. "You go around this world, telling everyone you're number one. The only way you get to stay number one is to be number one and this is the only title in the wrestling world that makes you number one. When you are king of the WWF, you rule the world. Whooo!"

Bobby Heenan, with a touch of sincerity, added, "I was never so impressed with anything I've seen in my life."

Flair continued: "It's the greatest moment of my life. I want to jump, I want to party, but I gotta tell it like this. For the Hulk Hogans and the Macho Mans and the Pipers and the Sids, now it's Ric Flair and you all gotta pay homage to the man. Whooo! I love it! I love it! I love it!"

Flair had entered the WWF less than five months earlier, claiming to be the "real World

Heavyweight Champion," sporting the beautiful gold NWA belt around his waist, which he retained the rights to after leaving WCW.

Flair then began defending the WWF Title against Hulk Hogan at arena shows, a position few fans thought was possible just two or three years earlier, expecting instead that if the two top box office draws from the '80s ever wrestled, it would be Flair challenging Hogan.

The matches continued until Wrestlemania where Flair's title reign was cut short by Randy Savage, who began his second WWF Title reign. However, the pathway to the loss was fun, as Flair and his associate "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig teased Savage with "revealing photos" of Flair with Savage's wife, Elizabeth. The angle, though, was cut short a few weeks before Wrestlemania when Elizabeth filed for divorce in real life.

In what proved to begin a transition title reign, Flair defeated Savage Sept. 1 in Hershey, Pa. to become a two-time WWF Champion. Oct. 12 in Saskatchewan, Hart defeated Flair by submission with the sharpshooter to win the WWF Title.

Flair then began a series of title matches against Hart, challenging to become a three-time WWF Champion. The series of matches with Hart were Flair's best in terms of match quality, including one of the highlights of Flair's career, a 60 minute challenge match in Boston Gardens.

The stipulations were that the two had to wrestle 60 minutes and the winner was the wrestler with the most falls. Hart won three falls to two in front of 6,000 fans in Boston.

Flair's stay in the WWF, beginning with anticipation of the Flair vs. Hogan battles, also included extended feuds with Roddy Piper, Randy Savage, and Bret Hart. It concluded with one of the most anticipated matches of all, Curt Hennig vs. Flair where Flair lost and was required to leave the WWF as a result.

As Flair returns to WCW in February 1993, he probably considers his WWF stint a successful chapter in his already brilliant career. Two title reigns are definitely two more than many expected McMahon would allow Flair, the representative of McMahon's main competition for years.



SIMMONS WINS WCW TITLE

Defeats Big Van Vader to Win His First Singles Title

Aug. 2, 1992 in Baltimore, Ron Simmons defeated Big Van Vader to become WCW Heavyweight Champion. Simmons, with an often mentioned credible college football background at FSU, had never held a singles wrestling title before beating Vader.

WCW did not play up Simmons being the "first WCW or NWA World Heavyweight Champion who happened to be black" beyond the first week, but that was likely part of the decision to make him champion.

But most importantly, for years WCW management had been touting Simmons as a future superstar for WCW, including Jim Ross in a "Torch Talk" interview.

Simmons, with his deep voice, power moves, and muscular build was a perfect choice by new WCW vice president Bill Watts to make his standard-bearer and give WCW a new look.

Watts handed Simmons the torch, but Simmons did not get far; he wasn't given much of a chance, either.

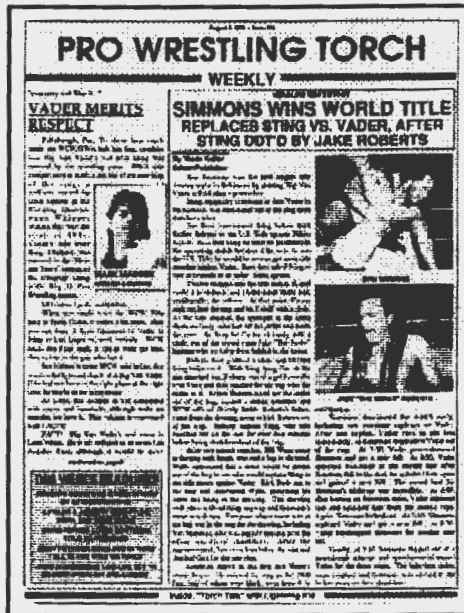
Simmons won the title with a lot of fanfare, but not much build-up. Sting was injured by Jake Roberts earlier that night in Baltimore and was unable to challenge Vader for the WCW Title, so a drawing was held. Ron Simmons's name was drawn and he received Sting's title shot.

Simmons celebrated his name being drawn and moments later, Vader entered the ring for the title match.

Simmons dominated the match early, including two awesome suplexes on Vader. After one suplex, Vader rose to his feet immediately. Simmons followed by dropkicking Vader out of the ring.

Three minutes into the match, Vader took over offense and powerslammed Simmons and gained a near fall. One minute later, Vader splashed Simmons into the corner. After Simmons fell to the mat, Vader splashed him again and gained a near fall. Each time Simmons kicked out, the 7,000 fans attending roared their approval.

Six minutes into the match, after continuing to beat on Simmons, Vader suplexed him from the second rope. Again, Simmons kicked out. A



moment later, Simmons suplexed Vader and got a near fall. Vader made a comeback and buttdropped Simmons for another near fall.

Finally, nine minutes into the bout, Simmons flipped out of a powerbomb attempt by Vader and speed-powerslammed Vader for the three count at 9:16.

As has been a tradition when babyfaces win a World Heavyweight Title, the babyface locker room emptied and filled the ring. After an in-ring celebration, everyone carried Simmons on their shoulders back to the locker room.

The matches and events from Baltimore were taped and aired the next weekend on TBS and nationally on WCW's syndicated network. Simmons's title reign was off to a strong beginning.

Simmons, though, lacked credibility. He received his title shot because of a drawing, not because he was the number one contender. He had not defeated an impressive string of opponents, nor had he received an especially big push in the preceding months. Simmons never held a singles title in WCW, either.

The most effective way to build credibility for Simmons would have probably been to do what the WWF did when Bret Hart became champion—have him defeat everyone with his

finisher. Hart became champion by defeating Ric Flair by submission with the sharpshooter. Hart then rolled through all competition, beating everyone with the sharpshooter.

Simmons, however, was not immediately given a string of strong victories over a variety of credible opponents. Instead, he fought Vader in rematches. His first major title defense was at the Halloween Havoc pay-per-view in October against the bland Barbarian.

Cactus Jack added an interesting dimension as Barbarian's second, but even through a series of creative videos, there was no way Simmons would gain credibility against Barbarian, whom few fans had any feelings toward, negative or positive. Instead, at Halloween Havoc, the "Spin the Wheel, Make a Deal" match between Sting and Jake Roberts stole the show.

Simmons, after Havoc, was stuck with a series of rematches against Barbarian and tag matches with Sting. Next up, though, was a credible heel who could add some interest to Simmons as World Champion.

A series of matches began at arenas between Simmons and WCW's number one heel Rick Rude, leading up to Starrcade where the same match was scheduled as the main event.

Starrcade came. A solid victory over Rude might have injected enough life into Simmons's faltering title reign to give it a chance to succeed. Instead, Rude was injured, so Simmons was stuck wrestling another wrestler fans had little interest in seeing challenge for the WCW Title, Steve "Dr. Death" Williams. Williams had been out of the WCW picture for a few months and while he was regularly active he had no strong role as a babyface or a heel.

Simmons had a dreadful match against Williams and his title reign was hours from a conclusion. Simmons's contract was due to expire within weeks and WCW did not want a WCW Title belt held over their head in contract negotiations. Simmons was scheduled to lose the title the night after Starrcade, but no-showed due to illness. The next night, Dec. 30, in Baltimore, Simmons lost to Vader.

Simmons's title reign, terribly mismanaged, probably came a couple years too soon for him.

11-50

THE REST OF TOP 50

A Brief Look at Other Top Stories

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|---|
| 11 | Bret Hart Wins WWF Title | 31 | WWA Summer Success In U.S. |
| 12 | Jim Herd Fired, Frey Hired | 32 | WCW Brings Back NWA Belts |
| 13 | Watts Gets Tough on Contracts | 33 | WWF-USWA Working Agreement |
| 14 | SummerSlam Draws 82,000 | 34 | Sid Justice Quits WWF |
| 15 | Pat Patterson Returns to WWF | 35 | Bulldog vs. Hart Steals Show at S-Slam |
| 16 | Ultimate Warrior Returns to WWF | 36 | Jake Roberts Joins, Quits WCW |
| 17 | Curt Hennig Returns to Ring as Face | 37 | Savage Divorce Cuts Angle Short |
| 18 | Luger Leaves WCW | 38 | Bob Backlund Returns to WWF |
| 19 | Papa Shango Voodoo Flops | 39 | WWF Locker Room Searched |
| 20 | Steiners Leave WCW for WWF | 40 | Bill Watts Bans Moves off Top Rope |
| 21 | Wrestlemania Draws 62,000 | 41 | Jesse Ventura Signs with WCW |
| 22 | Vader Wins WCW Title | 42 | Jerry Lawler Joins WWF Announcers |
| 23 | Heel Sean Michaels Wins I-C Title | 43 | Flair vs. Hart, Great Series of Matches |
| 24 | Legion of Doom Split | 44 | Williams & Gordy Win NWA, WCW Belts |
| 25 | Erik Watts Overpushed | 45 | WWF Airs Two Fox Specials |
| 26 | Paul E. Dangerously Phased Out of WCW | 46 | WCW Forms Booking Committee |
| 27 | WCW Lt. Heavyweight Division Dropped | 47 | Complete Demise of GWF |
| 28 | Randy Savage Wins WWF Title | 48 | Goodhart's TWA Folds |
| 29 | McMahon Starts WBF, WBF Folds | 49 | Buzz Sawyer Dies |
| 30 | Don Owen Retires from Promoting | 50 | WCW Issues Steroid Policy, Ignored |

Just edged out of the top ten was Bret Hart becoming WWF Champion and even more amazing, the WWF's tremendous investment and commitment in Hart from September through the end of the year. Hart was not a resounding success, marginal at best, but has potential given his extremely professional, dedicated push... Jim Herd's firing and Kip Frey's hiring would have made the top ten list if it had come earlier in the year, but because of Frey's short reign as WCW V.P., the story took a back seat. Had Herd remained in WCW, the wrestling world would be a different place today... One panelist deciding on the top stories of this year wrote as his number five choice, "Watts hired as VP, goes somewhat insane." Whether he went somewhat insane before or after being hired seems to be the most relevant question. Nevertheless, the way he handled contract negotiations was embarrassing for the wrestling business and TBS... Anytime over 80,000 fans fill a stadium for pro wrestling, it's big news, as occurred with 1992's SummerSlam... Had Pat Patterson not returned to the WWF, the WWF could be in much worse shape today... Ultimate Warrior's return, albeit temporary, was a shocker for fans and insiders... Hennig will be in the top ten list of 1993's top stories for some reason, probably for winning the WWF Title and being promoted as the real

replacement for Hogan for the '90s... Luger leaving WCW the day he lost the World Title was a blow to WCW, although not promotion-breaking... The Shango voo-doo angle was devastating to the WWF's attempt to recover from TitanGate... The Steiners leaving WCW for the WWF could prove to be big in 1993... Any time a wrestling card draws over 60,000 fans, it's big news, just not as big as drawing over 80,000... Vader was WCW's first credible and hated champion in years... Michaels's push was a breath of fresh air for many fans... LOD's split ended the tag team of the '80s, they just weren't much of a force in their final few years... Erik Watts's push late in 1992 was embarrassing and added to the theory that Watts went partially insane... Dangerously's lack of a push was astonishing given his talent... The light-heavyweight division could have raised the quality of many poor 1992 WCW events... Any time a World Title changes hands, it's big news. When the stale Savage begins another reign, it's not top 25 material... WBF's failure was a blow to McMahon's ego... Had Portland wrestling been more of a force, Owen's retirement would have been a top ten story. As it is, it's the end of a long era of honest, dignified promoting... The lucha libre style WWA almost started a trend, but behind the scenes squabbles

ruined a good thing... The NWA name wasn't worth much business, only title belt busy-ness... The WWF-USWA relationship didn't amount to much, but that it got as far as it did is astounding... Justice quits, what else is new?... Bulldog really rose to the occasion at SummerSlam... Roberts should have meant more to WCW... Savage's divorce not only hurt the Flair-Savage angle before Wrestlemania, but probably extended Savage's wrestling career... Backlund flopped... The WWF locker room search added credibility to TitanGate media coverage... Watts banning top rope moves was the first sign he had some catching up to do on the state of wrestling... Ventura's impact was much less than anticipated, as was his commitment to adjust to WCW's different announcing style... Lawler in the WWF? Come again... Flair vs. Hart capped a great Flair run in the WWF and produced some classics... Gordy & Williams flopped... Perhaps the last pro wrestling on network TV was the WWF on Fox... Rhodes's demotion to part of a committee could mean the end of Dusty finishes... GWF, who cares?... The TWA was a hardcore favorite... Buzz Sawyer was a truly unique individual who will be missed... WCW's steroid policy written by Frey might have been good, but possibly naive. Paying wrestlers to be lawful...

1992 PRO WRESTLING TORCH AWARDS

1. MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Ric Flair

1. Ric Flair (24%)

2. Rick Rude (23%)

3. Bret Hart (17%)

4. Sting (17%)

5. Randy Savage
(5%)

6-10) Shawn Michaels, Rick
Steamboat, Big Van Vader, Eddie
Gilbert, Ron Simmons.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Cactus Jack

1990: Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Sting

1989: Ric Flair, Terry Funk, Lex Luger

1988: Ric Flair, Ted DiBiase, Randy
Savage

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Mark Madden: Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Rick Rude. Both companies stink. Neither draw money. So how can anyone be considered valuable right now? But considering working ability, workrate, performance on interviews, and value to his promotion, the MVP can only be Ric Flair. Imagine the WWF without him. Actually, by the time this comes out you won't have to.

Bruce Mitchell: (1) Bret Hart improved his persona to a championship level and had the best set of PPV matches of any performer. Time will tell whether fans will accept Hart at this level. (2) Ric Flair did some of his best mic work in years and in many ways still sets the standard in this country for ringwork. (3) Shawn Michaels's work lived up to his promotion to main event status. Obviously there would be no Smoky Mountain Wrestling without Jim Cornette, who enters the ring enough to qualify for this award. I expect next year's MVP to be the District Attorney of Brooklyn County.

Carlie Gill: Really, it can't be anyone else but

Ric Flair. He held the WWF together after Hogan left and will have a huge influence on WCW. Sting grew a lot this year, not just ring-wise but attitude-wise as well. He had three excellent pay-per-view matches and became more comfortable as a leader. Rick Rude could have finished higher than third, but his poor performances during the "big shows" hurt him badly.

READER COMMENTS

Jeff Benson: Only one man came close to fitting the bill in the United States and that was Ric Flair. He fit the criteria of being one of, if not the best in-ring performer of the year, as well as doing the most for his promotion and being subject of the most news and rumors in and out of the ring in two different promotions. It was funny watching McMahon try to bury Flair but then frantically turn to him to save the ship every time it started sinking. Imagine how much more valuable Flair could have been to the promotion if used correctly. Imagine if he had retained the title against Savage at Wrestlemania and had

gone on to turn babyface leading into SummerSlam. Admittedly his matches have become far too repetitive, but he remains the best worker in the U.S. and for the particular style he works, the best in the world.

Jeff Surreff: Flair single-handedly brought many starved hardcore fans back to the WWF. Rude gets second. Starrcade flopped because he didn't wrestle. Sting gets third. His big problem is inconsistency.

Patrick Jones: Sting. He was WCW's number one wrestler all year without a doubt. WCW's problems are in the office, not in the ring and Sting had a great year in the ring delivering in every big match except for Halloween Havoc's main event. His pay-per-view matches against Big Van Vader and Cactus Jack were highlights.

Robert Solari: Just rename this the Slick Ric award. Flair saved Vince McMahon, flat out, with the de-emphasis of 'roid monsters, the inactivity of Hogan, the sliding of Savage's talents into oblivion, and the Warrior's inability to be the promotion's number one draw. Flair has been an inspiration. Night after night he is like the Energizer Bunny. Rude has kept my interest in WCW. His interviews have improved since he relied on Bobby Heenan. Rude's ring work has been superb. Third goes to Bret Hart who I believe will have a big impact in '93.

Chuck Richmond: WCW revolved around Rick Rude all year and Sting has also helped WCW from being almost a copy of Global. Bret Hart brought 30 minute WWF Title matches back along with a wrestling champion without screwjob finishes.

Joseph Puccio: Ric Flair represents everything that is great about pro wrestling. He is the Michael Jordan of wrestling. Bret Hart is finally getting the recognition he has deserved as WWF Champion. I would have picked Rude for number one or number two, but he has to work better on major events. Rude vs. Chono at Havoc was a joke.

Tim Davis: Sting. Sting is WCW. Sting is the one who brings those little Stingers to the arena. He's not the most popular among hardcores, but face it, without Sting, Erik Watts would be on top in WCW. Bret Hart gets second because he is one of the best in the country. Rick Rude gets third because he is one of the freshest heels around.

Chris Clark: Ric Flair is still the consummate professional in and out of the ring. He was botched in what could have been the biggest feud since Ali vs. Frazier and still somehow became the WWF's flagship wrestler. He is now one of only a handful of two-time WWF Champs. Cut him, and he bleeds wrestling. Bret Hart, the excellence of execution finally made it to the top. He wrestled in two of the year's greatest matches and spent little time without a belt. Hart adds credibility to a sport that desperately needs it.

Rick Steamboat, my third choice, has been near the pinnacle of WCW all year. He usually has a belt and is near the top of the WCW's major cards. He works hard and sells hard, and doggone it, people like him.

Gregg Zeidler: My top three picks are Bret Hart, Rick Rude, and Ric Flair. Both Hart and Rude had career years. The main difference between the two was the far superior work by Hart on PPV events. I believe Hart has the ability to be a good long term champion for the WWF if given the chance. Rude deserves second for his tremendous feud with Ricky Steamboat early in the year, strong interviews, and ability to draw heat throughout the year. Flair began the year with an exceptional performance at Royal Rumble, but after that, besides some excellent interviews, it was just an average year for him which amazingly is still enough for third place.

Anthony Scala: I'm going with Bret Hart. This was his most productive year yet, culminating with a submission win over Ric Flair for the WWF Title. Hart continues to improve, and very seldom has a bad match. He's even carried every stiff you can name to a decent level. Some of this year's best bouts involved Hart.

Dave Frey: Who really qualified for this award in a real down year? You have just gotta give it to Flair, who embodies all that is good, even though he was not well-booked other than the Royal Rumble.

Chris Orlando: Ric Flair has become the focal point of an organization one could never imagine him in. Still on top of his game in his 40s. Bret Hart has come a long way since the days of the Hart Foundation. Rick Rude was the best heel in a fledgling WCW. Where would WCW be without him?

Tim Whitehead: Bret Hart edges Ric Flair for the top slot because he was used properly all year, whereas Flair was used properly at Royal Rumble and misused the rest of the year. Hart had a good workrate, came through at the PPVs, and conducts himself well as champion. His interviews are the best of any babyface and he doesn't pander to the fans for cheap heat like past babyface WWF champions have done. True, he hasn't drawn massive crowds, but no one else has either. Rick Rude gets third for being the only truly interesting personality to appear consistently in WCW all year.

Jimmy Marshall: Ric Flair used his outstanding talent in 1992 to keep the WWF in business. Even through all the scandals and accusations, Flair led the way in '92 from his impressive one hour showing in Royal Rumble to his matches versus Savage and Hart.

Elyse Zois: Even though he didn't get to wrestle at Starrcade, Rude is still the most compelling wrestler in WCW. Ever since his arrival last year, Rude has been the number one heel, with or without Dangerously. Similarly, Ric Flair has

done the same in the WWF. From a masterful performance in the Royal Rumble to the kind of psychotic interviews not seen in many years, Flair seems rejuvenated and worthy of recognition. Third place goes to Lawler, for no good reason, other than he owns Memphis.

Betty Schaffer: Rick Rude was the shining star of WCW in 1992. He gave 100 percent and was a great worker, sold injuries and moves from others, and always gave fans a good match. I'm sorry he didn't end the year as heavyweight champ. Ric Flair is a classic and probably the greatest wrestler of his time. Bret Hart is as deserving of a championship belt as any of the champs in recent history have been.

Rich Bowman: While Ric Flair might have lost a step in the ring, he was still the focus of every major angle in the WWF this year. Slick Ric's performance in the Royal Rumble alone shows why he is the standard by which all others are judged. Rude was somewhat of a disappointment on his pay-per-view appearances, but was still one of the few reasons to watch WCW this year. If the WWF had given Bret Hart the type of opponents that the world champion should face and a better push, he might have gotten my vote for the top spot. I think if given the right push, Hart would be a fine choice as a long term champion in the WWF.

Steve Yohe: Ric Flair was much improved over 1991. He was the only reason to buy a WWF ticket. His body, workrate, interviews, enthusiasm, and hair were better than the year before. Rude proved he is a major star and Vader did everything asked of him. He even woke up Sting.

Robin Connor: Ric Flair may be old, but he epitomizes everything that is "realistic" about wrestling to the masses (without scandals) and is respected among the hardcore fans for workrate and interview quality. Long live the man.

Ian Goodwin: Sting may have proven why he is still the franchise wrestler of the '90s. In my opinion, Sting participated in at least seven four star-plus matches and was WCW's only babyface who drew any fans. Rude had a stellar year, both behind the mic and in the ring. Flair gets third for carrying the WWF for a time.

Robert D. Sears: Even though he was only on top for a few months, they were the best months the WWF had. Ric Flair was the best the WWF had to offer, period. It was a major mistake by Vince McMahon to take the belt away at Wrestlemania VIII. If he would have had it a few months longer, the WWF could be in better shape.

Jeff Cohen: We should step back and appreciate how Ric Flair has truly dominated the sport in recent years, especially evident when his absence can sometimes cause as large a ripple as his presence.

Editor's Picks: Flair, Hart, Rude.

2. MATCH OF THE YEAR

Brian Pillman vs. Jushin Liger

1. Pillman vs. Liger: Feb. 29 (18%)

2. Royal Rumble: Jan. 18 (10%)

3. WarGames: May 17 (9%)

4. Van Vader vs. Sting: Dec. 28, 1992 (9%)

5. British Bulldog vs. Bret Hart: Aug 29 (8%)

6-10) Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage: Apr. 5, Van Vader vs. Sting: July 12, Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels: Nov. 25, Randy Savage vs. Ultimate Warrior: Aug. 29, Sting vs. Cactus Jack: June 18.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Sting & Lex Luger vs. Rick & Scott Steiner, Bret Hart vs. "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig, Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. Larry Zbyszko & Arn Anderson

1990: Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane vs. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong, Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior, Nasty Boys vs. Rick & Scott Steiner

1989: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat (2/20), Flair vs. Steamboat (4/2), Flair vs. Steamboat (5/7)

1988: Ric Flair vs. Sting, Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers vs. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane, Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Chris Zavisa: Liger vs. Pillman (2/29), Hart vs. Bulldog (8/29), and Gilbert vs. Funk (11/25) were the top three matches this year. While none would make the top 20 in the United States, Pillman and Liger put on a 17 minute masterpiece back in the days when flying was allowed in WCW. They got the top spot. Hart vs. Smith was the WWF's best bout in a few years and saved the show in London.

Bruce Mitchell: Duke vs. Kentucky. Are you kidding me? (1) WarGames at Wrestlewar. Great work from all concerned and a ton of heat. Also, this was in some ways a historic match because it was probably the last great blood match in this country on a major pay-per-view. (2) Brian Pillman vs. Jushin Liger at SuperBrawl. Pillman and Liger were not only allowed, but encouraged to be their best. Both came through with a great performance. (3) The Royal Rumble. What amounted to a career retrospective for Ric Flair was not coincidentally more than an hour of great action and suspense.

Mark Madden: Royal Rumble, WarGames at WrestleWar, and Liger vs. Pillman at SuperBrawl. Any bout that makes me pop like a mark is a great one, and the only one that made me do that this year was the main event at the Ric Flair Rumble, a tour de force that saw Vince McMahon put Flair over like few thought possible. Champ, you weren't the only one with a tear in your eye when that was over. Besides, any bout that sees one man work hard for 60 minutes while going through a series of dramatic twists gets my vote no matter who's involved. We were lucky to see 60 minutes of hard work in some entire PPVs this year.

Carlle Gill: Jushin Liger vs. Brian Pillman from SuperBrawl is a match that should have set the tone for the entire year in WCW. It didn't and we may never see that match again, but it will certainly be remembered as a classic. Big Van Vader vs. Sting from Starrcade was even better than their match at the Bash and literally saved Starrcade from bombing. Third is the Heavenly Bodies vs. Fantastics match at Fire on the Mountain. A barbed wire cage match with heavy juice probably shouldn't be done in this day and age, but that aside it was an incredible match.

READER COMMENTS

Elyse Zois: After watching an entire year of wrestling, nothing tops the excitement of the Royal Rumble. Thankfully Vince McMahon

scrapped his plans to have Flair back into the belt and gave him a chance to shine. The best technical matches in the U.S. this year were between Brian Pillman and Jushin Liger.

Betty Schaffer: Ric Flair's 60 minutes made the Royal Rumble the best. It was incredible. Every time he almost fell off the ring apron, fans almost fell off their seats. It was fun to hear Bobby Heenan so nervous on commentary.

Rich Bowman: Liger defeating Pillman for the Light-Heavyweight Title at the Meadowlands was the best argument for a light heavyweight division. Hart vs. Bulldog at SummerSlam gave me much more than I expected. With a better finish, my third pick, The Royal Rumble, would have finished higher.

Steve Yohe: I thought Vader vs. Sting at the Bash was the best world title change in history. A clean finish after a dramatic brutal match. I popped.

Rick Kemp: Liger and Pillman worked better together than anyone in recent memory.

Jeff Benson: Sting vs. Cactus Jack in a falls count anywhere match at Halloween Havoc. Jack put on a performance of a lifetime and Sting is the perfect opponent for Cactus.

Rick Gorski: I knew no match could top Liger vs. Pillman in February as soon as I saw it.

Joseph Puccio: Hart vs. Piper was great because it mixed great brawling and great pure wrestling. Liger vs. Pillman lived up to expectations. And Flair vs. Savage at Wrestlemania had a lot of drama and a surprise ending.

Tim Davis: Liger vs. Pillman was one of the most amazing matches I've ever seen. Vader vs. Sting from Starrcade gets second because it showed how truly unique Vader is. And Flair kicking the entire WWF's butt in one night gets third.

Chris Clark: The Rumble is a solid gimmick match and truly was the Ric Flair show. The 60-minute man was razor sharp. I'm still out of breath since Hart vs. Michaels at Survivor Series. Hart vs. Bulldog at SummerSlam proved Hart could carry a big singles match and Smith proved he could still work if he had to.

Anthony Scala: Savage vs. Warrior at SummerSlam. Talk about suspense. This was perhaps the best booked match since Hogan vs. Warrior. Add Flair and Hennig to the drama and it was just a touch better than Hart vs. Bulldog.

Editor's Picks: Rumble, Liger vs. Pillman, Sting vs. Vader at the Bash.

3. BEST HEEL OF THE YEAR

Rick Rude

1. Rude (25%)
2. Ric Flair (23%)
3. Van Vader (16%)
4. Shawn Michaels (12%)
5. Cactus Jack (6%)

6-10) Jake Roberts, Brian Christopher, Razor Ramon, Dirty White Boy, Steve Austin

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Jake Roberts, The Undertaker, Ric Flair.

1990: Ric Flair, Stan Hansen, Curt Hennig.

1989: Terry Funk, Lex Luger, Randy Savage.

1988: Ted DiBiase, Barry Windham, Eddie Gilbert.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Carlie Gill: Rick Rude is far and away the best heel in the business. He's so obnoxious, even fans who traditionally cheer heels don't cheer for him. It's a credit to Rude that in a sport where the bad guys are often crowd favorites, he's been able to sustain real heel heat. Brian Christopher could probably give Rude a run for his money in a few years. He's going to be a huge star if he stays in the business. I never thought Shawn Michaels would be able to shed his teenybopper image and become a believable heel. All the little girls who worshipped Shawn & Marty must be crushed.

Chris Zavisa: Rick Rude, Shawn Michaels, and Ric Flair. Nobody here was able to draw any money, so the standard test cannot be used. Rude gets first for his ability behind the microphone and he was the central focus for WCW when Jake Roberts was flying in from the ozone. Michaels is the best young American worker in the business and really shined in 1992. Flair may be on the down side of a great career but he still was a joy to behold.

Mark Madden: Ric Flair (in the WWF), Sting,

and Rick Rude. Okay, so even WWF fans cheered Flair after a while. But in terms of presenting himself as a heel, both in deeds and interviews, no one was better than Flair. If Randy Savage had allowed the Elizabeth angle to be done right, it might have even been Flair's finest hour. As it was, it was close. Hey, a quick thought. Do you suppose Ted Turner called up Vince in January and said, "Hey pal, Ric Flair was MINE before he was yours. Whooo! One more time, Junior!"

Bruce Mitchell: 1. Rick Rude might be the last heel in this country because a lot of fans seem to really hate his guts. 2. Van Vader is a real monster and inspires awe and respect from everyone. 3. Dirty White Boy was a top-notch heel, particularly for his market.

READER COMMENTS

Joseph Puccio: There is no one more sinister than Jake Roberts. He's as sadistic as they come. Flair and Rude obviously come in second and third.

Tim Davis: Rick Rude's performance as a cocky, arrogant heels has been perfect. Vader gets second. His dominant, destructive ring work is amazing. Ric Flair gets third because he's still the dirtiest player in the game.

Chris Clark: Big Van Vader, no question. He is a true monster heel, legitimately hurting people for heat. He emanates power and toughness. I'd stay out of his way. Shawn Michaels gets second. Yeah, he's a sexy boy, and people hate him. He pulls off the arrogance perfectly and proved the WWF can manage a heel under 300 pounds. Rick Rude has made quite a name for himself. Ole swivel-hips was still arrogant and oozing libido, but this year he had a tough edge. Rude was often the heel to beat in WCW, and still had less bodyfat than a screen door.

Gregg Zeidler: There was not one heel who stood out during the year, but Rick Rude was the most consistent. He was able to draw heat throughout the year, although his heat has fallen off since Paul E. Dangerously left his side. Although Cactus Jack had a down year, he portrayed a good heel and gets second. Flair gets third.

Anthony Scala: Van Vader wins it. Just his appearance alone could win it for him.

Ian Goodwin: Rude got a basically heel favoring Meadowlands crowd to boo him angrily. That's a feat. Vader is now the prototypical monster heel and a truly physically intimidating force.

Chris Hanna: Shawn Michaels didn't leave the building until he studied Ric Flair. He's Ric Flair Jr., Flair gets first and Michaels gets second.

Tim Whitehead: Rick Rude and Ric Flair are number one and number two.. They combined arrogance and workrate. Flair had better heel interviews but once again was promoted poorly and gets edged out by Rude for the top spot. SMW's Dirty White Boy gets third. Dirty has long been underrated both as a worker and as a heel character. His violent attacks on Tim Horner were well-executed, and having Ron Wright for a manager doesn't hurt, either.

Jeff Benson: It has to go to Rick Rude. I am becoming less and less impressed with Rude in the ring, but he has the heel persona down much better than anyone else in wrestling. He draws incredible heat, but he is going to have to perform in some hotter matches to be the true superstar he could be. Last year's winner Jake Roberts wasn't the same in the ring this year. Brian Christopher could be next year's winner. A lot of people say Flair deserves this award, but I have not been as impressed with his heel persona in the WWF as some others. He was very good, but hardly great.

Stu Brynien: Shawn Michaels. Who else? Finally free of the burden of having to portray a good guy all of the time, Michaels looks like he's having a hell of a lot of fun playing ultimate dimple-chinned devil. I liked everything about him: his entrance music, his mirror gimmick, his bits with Sensational Sherri... and lest we forget Michaels is one bully who knows his way around the ring.

Elyse Zois: Rick Rude is one heel in a major promotion who actually gets heel heat, so he deserves to win. He also had great feuds with Sting and Steamboat. Flair gets second. Dirty White Boy gets third. He may be in a regional promotion, but his battles with Brian Lee and especially Tim Horner have been great.

Robin Connor: I had a tough time picking between Shawn Michaels and Razor Ramon. I picked Michaels and although I do not believe he gets as much heat as Ramon does, he has consistently better matches, more technical skill, and more athletic ability.

Steve Yohe: Flair, Ramon, and Rude. As a heel, I think Ramon is great. His interviews are tops and he never breaks character. He never gives fans anything to admire. One of the pure heels left.

Editor's Picks: Rude, Vader, Christopher.

4. BEST BABYFACE OF THE YEAR

Sting

1. Sting (25%)
 2. Bret Hart (20%)
 3. Randy Savage (12%)
 4. Rick Steamboat (8%)
 5. Undertaker (8%)
- 6-10) Ultimate Warrior, Dustin Rhodes, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, British Bulldog.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Hulk Hogan, Sting, Savage.
1990: Hulk Hogan, Sting, Lex Luger.
1989: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Sting.
1988: Sting, Hulk Hogan, Savage.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Chris Zavis: Ricky Steamboat, Bret Hart, and Sting. Another sad category with the awful decline of U.S. wrestling in 1992. Steamboat is still one class professional who gives it his all in workrate and projects a solid babyface personality. Hart did a decent job at carrying the WWF World Title and the features the WWF did with him were something different. Sting is vastly overrated, but was a bit more effective toward the end of the year.

Bruce Mitchell: What a lousy year for this category. The cowardly, dishonest manner in which longtime winner Hulk Hogan dealt with the steroid disqualified him for any consideration here. 1. Sting had some good matches with Cactus Jack and Vader, and is still more over than anyone with the fans in arenas. 2. Rick Steamboat had a decent year, but lost luster through no real fault of his own. 3. Bret Hart put together a very good year, but has not proven himself as a main event draw.

Carlie Gill: Sting, Dustin Rhodes, and Bret Hart. Hart locked up third with that apparently unscripted interview done with Vince McMahon on Prime Time after he won the WWF Title. He came across as an average guy who works hard and appreciates the fans. His practice of giving

his glasses to a child at ringside has always been a nice touch. Dustin Rhodes, like Rick Rude on the heel side, can never be anything other than a face. His persona is the polar opposite of his obnoxious father. When it came to crowd reaction, drawing power (what little of it anyone has), and all the other intangibles, Sting stood out as the true top babyface in a Hogan-less wrestling world. I have a feeling Slick Ric will give him some tough competition for this award in the next yearbook, though.

Mark Madden: Ric Flair (in WCW), Sting, Jerry Lawler. I know I'm contradicting myself if you look at my best heel reasoning, but screw it. There were no true babyfaces in wrestling this year. Ric Flair, despite not being there, got the most consistent babyface response at WCW shows. Think about it, who got more chants, Flair or Sting? Sting gets second for a good babyface act. Lawler takes third for holding Memphis together.

READER COMMENTS

Steve Yohe: Bret Hart gets my pick because he is the best worker. Vader puts Sting over so well that there is renewed interest in him. Rhodes gets my third slot and will be great if used right. I would push him to the top and I'm not his father. He has earned his push.

Rick Kemp: Sting. A lot of good feuds, a good personality, and a good workrate.

Elyse Zois: Even though he hasn't wrestled since April, he is probably still the most over wrestler in the U.S. I was in the Hoosier Dome for Wrestlemania and heard the pop of the crowd when Hogan came out. Sting had a down year as a major babyface, but given the push he should get coming out of Starrcade, he'll probably be back on the charts. Right now, the most over face in WCW is probably Dustin Rhodes and his star will go even higher.

Robin Connor: Undertaker. I have always been partial to the heels, so this is tough for me to call. I guess I'll just pick the most heel-like face. That, and I really enjoyed his matches against Kamala this year.

Steve Sims: Undertaker gets first place, followed by the most obvious, Sting, and now inactive Hulk Hogan.

Betty Schaffer: Bret Hart is first. He sets a good example, he works hard, he has charisma, and he generates excitement. I wish outside the arena he

would give more time to the fans who cheer him inside the arena. Sting gets second. Ron Simmons gets third. He was fresh and tough. Many other top stars are neither.

Joseph Puccio: Without a doubt, Undertaker receives the biggest pop from the crowd. I don't know why, but this guy is really loved by the fans. I think Hart is going great as Champion and Sting is the most over face in WCW, much more than Ron Simmons.

Tim Davis: Bret Hart is one of the more convincing babyfaces in a long time.

Chris Clark: Rick Steamboat gets first, but how a guy this bland can be so popular is beyond me. Second goes to Big Bossman. Every time I saw this guy, he got the biggest pop of the night. Kiddies love his law, order, and justice schtick. Dropping all of the weight helped his popularity and mobility. Sting, in third place, had a cool year, but was still the focal face.

Gregg Zeidler: Even when Ron Simmons was champion, Sting was still WCW's number one babyface. Jerry Lawler gets second for his consistency and Dustin Rhodes deserves third.

Chris Hanna: Undertaker gets first. Anyone representing death who gets over as a babyface deserves first place.

Stu Brynien: Bret Hart is everything a genuine babyface champion should be: quiet, respectful, kind to children, and willing to tackle evil where he finds it. He doesn't rant and rave when he's got a mic in his face, but is inclined, instead, to let his skills as a wrestler do the talking. Hulk Hogan's act—loud, hyper, and more than a little vain—was effective in its own way, and certainly pleased his fans, but Bret, it seems to me—as the strong silent type, is a glittering example of the kind of “old-fashioned” hero that the WWF has been missing for a while.

John Patton: Sting gets first. His presence electrifies arenas. Bret Hart gets second. His interviews got him over a likeable guy, but he didn't overdo it like Backlund did. Undertaker gets third. Anytime fans cheer a guy in this role, he is doing his job well.

Dave Frey: Hogan worked enough to get this.

Tim Whitehead: Bret Hart is number one for combining workrate with interview ability without degenerating into pandering.

Editor's Picks: Hart, Sting, Hogan.

5. BEST FEUD OF THE YEAR

Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage

1. Flair vs. Savage (18%)
2. Moondogs vs. Lawler & Jarrett (14%)
3. Vader vs. Sting (12%)
4. Rude vs. Steamboat (11%)
5. Rude vs. Sting (7%)

6-10) Heavenly Bodies vs. Rock & Roll Express, Bodies vs. The Fantastics, Bret Hart vs. Ric Flair, Sting vs. Jake Roberts, Terry Gordy & Steve Williams vs. Rick & Scott Steiner.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Eddie Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack, Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan, Sting vs. Cactus Jack.

1990: Nasty Boys vs. The Steiners, Ric Flair vs. Sting, Jerry Lawler vs. Eddie Gilbert.

1989: Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk, Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat, Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage.

1988: Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase, The Fantastics vs. The Midnight Express, Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Mark Madden: Lawler & Jarrett vs. The Moondogs, Flair vs. Savage, and Sting vs. Vader. I enjoyed Flair vs. Savage more, but it wasn't done hardcore enough, nor carried through to its best possible conclusion. Lawler & Jarrett vs. The Moondogs gets first because it was played out successfully over a long period of time and because it increased houses in Memphis. WWF

and WCW bookers could take a lesson from the lengthy way this feud was put over.

Bruce Mitchell: 1. Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage was an excellent feud until they revealed the photos were fake and put the belt back on Savage. Still, the most intriguing and well-thought-out feud of the year. 2. The Heavenly Bodies vs. The Fantastics was a model feud—consistent storyline and great in-ring work. 3. Sting vs. Vader produced some very good matches and real concern for the welfare of the babyface, Sting.

Carlie Gill: If I may, 1992 was a lousy year for feuds. In fact, it was so bad that my number three pick is the feud that actually had the most heat but didn't involve any actual matches, Bill Watts vs. his wrestlers, although I'd bet my life that many of the guys in WCW (and probably Madusa, too) would like to get Watts alone in a wrestling ring. Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage is second, although I hated the doctored Liz photos and it was a major mistake to put the WWF Title on a stale Randy Savage. The best feud of the year occurred early with Rick Rude and Rick Steamboat. It had a storyline, great matches, and plenty of heat. It really stood out above everything else.

Chris Zavisa: Lawler & Jarrett vs. The Moondogs, Flair vs. Hart, and Watts vs. Rude. The best things to come out of Memphis in many years were the wild brawls between the Dogs and Lawler & Jarrett. It made Memphis tapes worth watching again. Too bad the other promotions don't adopt some of this. Flair vs. Hart toward the end of the year gave us consistently good matches at the arenas. I fail to see the greatness in putting your top heel, Rick Rude, against a terribly green rookie, Watts, but once again Bill Watts has forgotten more about wrestling than any of us could ever hope to learn, so he must know what he is doing. Placing my blind faith in the Cowboy, Watts vs. Rude gets my vote for third.

READER COMMENTS

Tim Whitehead: Heavenly Bodies vs. The Fantastics featured several four-star bouts, terrific heat at the live shows, great interviews, a lot of impromptu brawls on TV, and the angle of the year when the back window of Cornette's car was broken with a steel pipe. Moondogs vs. Lawler & Jarrett was highlighted by good angles and interviews and featured some awesome

brawls, earning the number two slot. Heavenly Bodies vs. Rock & Roll Express earns number three, although it's arguably as good as Bodies vs. Fantastics. It just hasn't run its full course as of the end of the year. These three feuds blew away anything in WCW or the WWF in 1992.

Jimmy Marshall: Hogan vs. Flair gets the nod in 1992. Not because of impressive angles or great matches, but because it was the match everyone said would never happen.

Jeff Benson: Definitely a two feud race. Lawler & Jarrett vs. The Moondogs provided some of the greatest brawls of all time and really gave Memphis a boost when it needed it. But as is usually the case with Memphis, a great thing was dragged on much too long and got stale. The Heavenly Bodies vs. Fantastics feud did not get as stale, had some great brawls as well, and provided much better matches in general, so I have to give that the edge. Those two feuds are so far ahead of anything else in the U.S. this year, it's tough to come up with a third pick. Paul E. Dangerously vs. Bill Watts is up there.

Barry Kramer: Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage proved that two men around 40 can do it all.

Andy Stowell: Sting and Vader seemed to try as hard as they possibly could under the adverse management conditions present in WCW.

Rick Kemp: Flair vs. Savage lasted a while and involved a couple different angles which kept it interesting. Two of the top stars of the '80s battling in the '90s. That's good enough for me.

Robin Connor: I loved the build up, I loved the promotion of the four nights of Thanksgiving Thunder tag title matches, and I loved the title changes, so Rock & Roll Express vs. Bodies gets first.

Steve Sims: Does McMahon vs. The Truth qualify?

Betty Schaffer: Flair vs. Savage had all the drama that makes watching from week to week fun. The interviews and video segments had a beginning, middle, and an end. Sting vs. Vader had a real chemistry, also.

Rich Bowman: Even without national exposure, The Moondogs vs. Jarrett & Lawler was sheer violence worth remembering.

Editor's Picks: Fantastics vs. Bodies, Rock & Roll vs. Bodies, Moondogs vs. Lawler & Jarrett.

6. MVT OF THE YEAR

Steve Williams & Terry Gordy

1. Steve Williams & Terry Gordy (16%)

2. Rick & Scott Steiner (15%)

3. Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton (13%)

4. The Heavenly Bodies (9%)

5. The Legion of Doom (8%)

6-10) The Rock & Roll Express, Money Inc., Barry Windham & Dustin Rhodes, The Moondogs, The Nasty Boys

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Rick & Scott Steiner, Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko, The Rockers.

1990: Rick & Scott Steiner, Midnight Express, Butch Reed & Ron Simmons.

1989: Arn Anderson & Tully Blanchard, The Rockers, Road Warriors.

1988: Midnight Express, Fantastics, Road Warriors

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Chris Zavis: The Moondogs, Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton, and Rick & Scott Steiner. The only tag team that was a pleasure to watch was the wild carnage wrought by Richard Lee's Moondogs in Memphis. Eaton & Anderson get the professionalism award for being good on a nightly basis when all around them was crumbling away. The Steiners were still good, but they showed a noticeable decline in their

work in the States. Instead of an award, they should be given thirty days in the state pen for mugging Takayuki Iizuka in Florida.

Bruce Mitchell: 1. Ironically, a regional promotion produced the best major league tag team in the business: The Heavenly Bodies. The build up and execution of this new/old concept was first-rate. 2. Dustin Rhodes & Barry Windham were pretty good. 3. Terry Garvin & Mel Philips got a ton of national publicity and had a huge impact on the biz, but of course their best work was not in the ring.

Mark Madden: Heavenly Bodies, Gordy & Williams, and The Steiners. The most entertaining tag team to watch in 1992 was the Bodies, thanks in no small part to Jim Cornette, but also in no small part due to the work of Tom Prichard and a clearly rejuvenated Stan Lane. Gordy & Williams should have been an easy first, but their work in America, by their standards, was subpar.

Carlie Gill: I really, really want to vote for Terry Gordy & Steve Williams, but their behind-the-scenes conflict with Watts, four huge egos clashing during the Steiners feud, and their apparent wish to take it easy in WCW to avoid injuring themselves and threatening their Japan dates, eliminated them from contention. They were awesome all year in Japan rings, though. Anyway, I pick the Moondogs for keeping a dying promotion afloat all year. Second place to the Heavenly Bodies for their consistent work in SMW and third to the Rock & Roll Express for helping SMW to some impressive box office figures.

READER COMMENTS

Rick Kemp: Steve Williams & Terry Gordy really made WCW's tag team situation brighter for a while. No other team really did much, although I'm sure the Bushwackers sold more t-shirts.

Elyse Zois: I vote for the Moondogs, strictly for their innovative use of foreign objects. The Heavenly Bodies might not be the Midnight Express, but who is? They are still a good team and get second place. Williams & Gordy didn't last in WCW very long, but they were the team to finally put down the Steiners.

Steve Yohe: Rick & Scott Steiners are true stars and far ahead of everyone else. I hope they can find someone to wrestle in the WWF.

Robin Connor: The Heavenly Bodies. After

seeing their matches live, there was no doubt in my who was the MVT. Although I was disappointing when the Midnight Express broke-up, the workrate of Stan Lane & Tom Prichard has been impressive.

Tim Whitehead: The Heavenly Bodies by a wide margin. They worked their butts off in the ring and were involved in two of the best feuds of the year. Although often they were overshadowed by Jim Cornette, Stan Lane & Tom Prichard's interview skills shouldn't be overlooked. Williams & Gordy were a consistent team during their WCW run, scoring second place. The Fantastics get third place for those brawls with the Bodies in the Summer in SMW. The Steiners were okay for the most part, but I think they slipped out of the top three this year.

Joseph Puccio: Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton, hands down. Their workrate stands out. Gordy & Williams are awesome in both the States and Japan. LOD gained the most fan interest.

Tim Davis: Tex Slazenger & Shanghai Pierce are living proof of how badly WCW needs the Steiners.

Chris Clark: Bobby Eaton & Arn Anderson gelled like chewing gum and a sidewalk on a hot day. One was tough as nails, the other smooth as silk. No face paint, no varsity jackets, just good wrestling.

There was not one single team that meant anything to any promotion this year. The Heavenly Bodies might win next year since they are getting over as the real stars of SMW, but nobody in WCW or the WWF was a important team.

John Patton: The Heavenly Bodies get first. They had outstanding matches and great heat (thanks to Cornette) all year 'round. The Steiners get second. They are the most talented team there is. The Moondogs get third. These guys are hilarious.

Stu Brynien: The earn the nod here as much for the contributions of their kamikaze manager, Jim Cornette, as for anything they did in the ring. As anyone who saw them knows, however, Stan Lane & Tom Prichard did a lot in the ring—and in the aisles, in the locker room, in the parking lot... And Jim Cornette was with them every step of the way, as physically involved as ever, giving as good as he has got. Rock & Roll gets second.

Editor's Picks: Heavenly Bodies, The Moondogs, Lawler & Jarrett.

7. BEST BRAWLER OF THE YEAR

Cactus Jack

**1. Cactus Jack
(24%)**

2. Eddie Gilbert (23%)

**3. The Moondogs
(14%)**

**4. Big Van Vader
(13%)**

5. Jerry Lawler (5%)

**6-10) Terry Funk, Steve Williams,
Ric Flair, Barry Windham, Terry
Gordy.**

PAST WINNERS:

**1991: Cactus Jack, Eddie Gilbert, Stan
Hansen (first year as category).**

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Mark Madden: Moondogs, Terry Funk, Ron Garvin. I almost considered penalizing The Moondogs for potato-ing all those jobbers, but hell, the object is to make it look good, and they sure did. Some of those chair shots were just unbelievable. Jerry Jarrett can't pay those jobbers enough... come to think of it, I know he doesn't. Funk gets second just for the battle with Eddie Gilbert in New Jersey. This was a weak year for brawlers, especially in the two major promotions where lack of blood keeps a good brawl from getting over.

Carlie Gill: Jerry Lawler is first for his brawls with the Moondogs. Eddie Gilbert is second for his brawls with the Moondogs, and third, well, The Moondogs for their work with Lawler and Gilbert. Cactus Jack, where have you gone?

Bruce Mitchell: 1. The Moondogs revived their careers and the Memphis promotion with this style. 2. Cactus Jack had some good brawls in the beginning of the year. 3. Eddie Gilbert.

Chris Zavisa: Jerry Lawler, The Moondogs, and Eddie Gilbert. Lawler and the Moondogs were the one bright spot on the U.S. scene through most of the year. Lawler gets the nod for the top

spot since he carried the thing. Gilbert gets third on the strength of his performance in Wayne, N.J. against Terry Funk in October.

READER COMMENTS

Chris Clark: The Moondogs. Quality and consistency are the marks of greatness and the Moondogs had it. Every time they went to the ring, they were a brawl waiting to explode. These Dogs don't just bark, they bite. Second goes to Big Van Vader. Bob Backlund, he ain't. But he also isn't some pasty-faced wimp. Vader beats the hell out of people and he did it all year. He actually punched his way to a WCW Title in 1992.

Anthony Scala: Big Van Vader. I would imagine fighting this guy is similar to being attacked by a street gang. Obviously, his tough style has seriously injured many wrestlers. Cactus Jack, although he has slowed down a bit, is still a top brawler. Steve Williams rounds out the top three.

Ian Goodwin: Big Van Vader, Cactus Jack, and Barry Windham. No one works a stiffer style or is such a brutally realistic force in the ring. Windham earned recognition as a world class brawler by breaking out the fire extinguisher during a classic Meadowlands bunkhouse match in March. He cemented the spot by tattooing Steamboat and Douglas with chairs at the November Clash.

Robert Sears: Big Van Vader is quickly becoming the best big man in the business. Gilbert gets second and is still one of the best in the sport.

Jeff Cohen: I'll vote for Cactus Jack until he dies. This could be the year, unless he holds out for more workman's comp. Sting gets second for his work with Cactus Jack.

Chris Hanna: He may feel no pain, but Van Vader's opponents are another matter.

Tim Whitehead: Although accumulated injuries slowed him down the last few months of the year, Cactus Jack deserves this again for his Topeka Clash brawl with Van Hammer and his Beach Blast match against Sting. The Moondogs get second, though they do so at the expense of a lot of maimed Memphis jobbers. Van Vader is really solid in this category, and is a close third.

Jeff Sureff: Terry Funk gets first. He punches, chokes, uses foreign objects, kicks below the

belt. Now, this is a brawler.

Barry Kramer: Barry Windham in 1992 was Cactus Jack reborn. Arn Anderson gets second and Ric Flair, backed by his Royal Rumble performance, gets third.

Robert Solari: This was the Moondogs' year. I loved to see how many objects these guys could bring into the ring or how many jobbers they could legitimately squash.

Joseph Puccio: Eddie Gilbert is still the best brawler there is. Even though Cactus Jack was out of action for a while, he still deserves my second pick. Jake Roberts is a good brawler, too.

Tim Davis: The Moondogs get first. Cactus Jack only gets second because his skills were only utilized at Beach Blast and the January Clash. Shawn Michaels and his kamikaze bumps get third.

Stu Brynien: Ric Flair. I know he is not the Bruiser Brody type. I know he can actually apply a hold or two, and that over his years his skills as a wrestler have been admired every bit as much as his skills as a showman. But in 1992, which was admittedly a year in which I could have counted the number of genuine brawls I saw on the fingers of one hand, Flair was as tireless a brawler as he was a tactician. In some of the biggest matches of the year, in fact, he was mostly a brawler. His showdown with Savage at Wrestlemania and his Survivor Series match with Razor Ramon against Randy Savage & Mr. Perfect saw Flair set the tone.

Andy Stowell: Van Vader's brawling style is perfectly suited for his size and his gimmick. He also is really good at selling for other wrestlers, and knowing just when to squash them. His invulnerability helped get Simmons over as champion.

Rick Kemp: Big Van Vader gets first. He makes it look so real. If I was a jobber, I would quit before I'd get in the ring with him.

Berry Shaffer: Cactus Jack uses his body as a weapon and often hurts himself as much as his opponent. He is truly dedicated to wrestling as is proven by the bumps he takes.

Rich Bowman: When Cactus Jack suplexed a ladder onto Rick Steamboat during a house show in Philadelphia, he won my vote.

Editor's Picks: Moondogs, Windham, Vader.

8. BEST AERIAL WRESTLER

Jushin Thunder Liger

1. Jushin Liger (37%)
2. Brian Pillman (32%)
3. Lightning Kid (18%)
4. Too Cold Scorpio (6%)
5. Shawn Michaels (4%)

6-10) Great Muta, Bill Wilcox, Owen Hart, Bobby Eaton, Sabu

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Jushin Thunder Liger, Brian Pillman, Lightning Kid (first year as category).

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Chris Zavisa: Lightning Kid, Bill Wilcox, and Sabu. Gee, this is really difficult since I do not want to slight the many great flyers who worked for WCW and the WWF during 1992. Well, rather than do that, I will restrict myself to independent workers who actually do clear that top rope occasionally. Lightning Kid is the best flyer in this country and uses it on a regular basis as a valuable part of his routine. Wilcox is a great highspot wrestler and suicidal flyer, but nearly killing Lightning cost him the top spot. Sabu is a great flyer but only gets third because his work in the States is infrequent.

Bruce Mitchell: Pick 'em—Lightning Kid, Pillman, and Liger.

Mark Madden: Liger, Pillman, and Lightning. Even handcuffed and weighted down by Watts, Liger still flew higher, faster, further, and better than any other wrestler in America. Brian Pillman was a very close and very good second. Why can't Lightning Kid get a job with the WWF or WCW?

Carlie Gill: Jushin Liger, Brian Pillman, and Lightning Kid. Honorable mention to Too Cold Scorpio for that neat one and a half gainer that I

tried but could never master off a diving board.

READER COMMENTS

Chris Clark: Jushin Liger gets first. This little fella may be the finest grappler in the ring today. It's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's Jushin Thunder Liger. Owen Hart gets second. When the Rockers broke up, the WWF looked for Hart to keep the ballet matches rolling. The end result was goofy pants and good high-flying. Shawn Michaels gets third. A change in attitude didn't change Shawn's ability to get up and go.

Anthony Scala: Jushin Liger had enough high-flying spectacular moves in '92 to earn him this award. It's always interesting to see what he'll come up with next. Brian Pillman was more of a high flyer before his heel turn, but still gets second place for his great ring work. Lightning Kid gets third.

Ian Goodwin: Based on his 360 degree flip and his inventive moves at Starrcade, Scorpio appears to have a ton of potential.

Robert Sears: Liger's aerial moves made me enjoy wrestling a little more this year.

Chris Hanna: I'd like to see Muta with a WCW belt for six months or so, preferably the World Title. Maybe his talent would rub off on the boxers, football players, and guitar handlers.

John Keeler: Jushin Liger is number one and always will be.

Scott Dickey: When Brian Pillman turned heel, his style changed and he flew less often. Jushin Liger gets first place.

Tim Whitehead: Jushin Liger is a landslide for number one. There almost wasn't a number two or three thanks to Bill Watts's ban of top rope moves, but Brian Pillman and Bobby Eaton got in enough good moves early in the year to earn those spots.

Jeff Sureff: Great Muta is still the best in American when he's here. Jushin Liger is right up there. Third place goes to Rick Steamboat, who edges out the grounded Jushin Liger.

Joseph Puccio: There's just no one better than Liger in this category. Lightning Kid and Brian Pillman come close, but no cigar.

Tim Davis: Jushin Liger. One word: SuperBrawl. Brian Pillman gets second. Lightning Kid gets third.

Steve Yohe: Number one goes to Too Cold Scorpio. Lightning Kid gets second. Eddy Guerrero gets third. We had football players in the '70s, bodybuilders in the '80s, and it looks like we're in for gymnasts in the '90s. Three-hundred-sixty degree flips from the balcony are now considered mandatory if you want to have a good match. Scorpio can't wrestle yet, but he does something new to wrestling in every match.

Shawn Evans: Liger's aerial skills are beyond belief. They are original and dynamic. He is one of the best in the ring. Second place goes to Lightning Kid because his aerial skills are faster than lightning, yet for his size he has thunderous power to his moves. Third place goes to Chris Benoit followed closely by Brian Pillman.

Robin Connor: Lightning Kid gets first, but Chris Benoit is a close second.

Betty Schaffer: It is rare in this country that we see anyone with the intricate flying moves that Liger has.

Rich Bowman: Jushin Liger. If there is anything left to say, I sure can't think of it. Simply the best in the air. Brian Pillman and Too Cold Scorpio get second. Watts is right, with these three stiffs, who wants to see a light-heavyweight division.

Andy Stowell: Jushin Liger was so wasted by Bill Watts that I don't know why he even agrees to wrestle in the United States, but when he isn't shackled, he's still the best in the world. His best performance in this country was during the NWA Tag Team Title Tournament against Chris Benoit, but of course WCW overlooked that when booking him at Starrcade. At least they didn't have him submit to Erik Watts.

John Patton: Brian Pillman is still the best in the U.S., although he is limited as heel. Too Cold Scorpio gets second. This award will be his in the years to come. Rick Steamboat gets third and is still one of the best.

Stu Brynien: Without Marty Jannetty by his side, Shawn Michaels kept the action on the mat more than ever last year, but showed he could still launch himself off, through, and over the ropes with the best of them. And he sold moves with his usual bevy of breathtaking bumps. He was fun to watch, although admittedly not a pure daredevil like Jushin Liger.

Editor's Picks: Liger, Scorpio, Kid.

9. BEST MAJOR TELEVISION EVENT

Royal Rumble

1. Rumble (15%)
2. Wrestlemania VIII (13%)
3. SuperBrawl II (12%)
4. SummerSlam (11%)
5. Beach Blast (11%)

6-10) Survivor Series, WrestleWar, Starrcade '92, Great American Bash, Clash of the Champions XX.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: WCW WrestleWar '91, WCW SuperBrawl I, WCW Japan Supershow.

1990: WCW Great American Bash, WWF Wrestlemania VI, WCW Starrcade '90.

1989: NWA Great American Bash, NWA WrestleWar '89, NWA Chi-Town Rumble.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Carlie Gill: It was a lousy year for both groups in this category. Most of us have been forced to lower our standards to the point that two good matches equals a good show. SuperBrawl gets the nod for the great Liger vs. Pillman match and for the last appearance of Lex "Apeman" Luger in a WCW ring. WrestleWar was another good show. There was a lot of anticipation because Watts had just been hired so everyone worked extra hard for the new boss. How quickly things change. Survivor Series gets third. I was in the minority but I really liked the show. It was well-paced and well-planned and the crowd stayed hot for the main event.

Mark Madden: SummerSlam, Royal Rumble, and Starrcade '92. Let's face it, all a PPV is in these troubled times is a few good matches sandwiched around a bunch of crap. SummerSlam had two superb matches, Royal Rumble had one. Starrcade actually had two matches comparable to SummerSlam's but the BattleBowl non-concept—think about it, how is a tag tournament related, let alone, connected, to a Battle Royal?—dropped it to third.

Bruce Mitchell: SummerSlam had two excellent matches and an incredible atmosphere. Beach Brawl was pretty good, particularly compared to what followed.

Chris Zavisa: SuperBrawl, WrestleWar, and Beach Brawl. I am not certain any card deserves even as much as momentary consideration for this category since there was not one great event held all year by the major promotions. WCW's SuperBrawl had Liger vs. Pillman plus some decent tag bouts and even Luger's swan song thrown in for good measure, so it gets the nod. The WrestleWar had WarGames and it's hard not to please the crowd with that "can't miss" gimmick. Beach Blast had Cactus vs. Sting, a good six-man bout, and the Steiners vs. Gordy & Williams.

READER COMMENTS

Anthony Scala: SummerSlam gets first. It was headlined with two of the year's better matches. The atmosphere in England at the outdoor stadium made it seem special. The WWF knows how to run a pay-per-view, as opposed to WCW. When the WWF's show ends, you leave it with a good feeling. The undercard might not be filled with four-star bouts, but at least the bouts are good-to-excellent. Wrestlemania was a great show with several exceptional bouts. Royal Rumble scores third. Besides Flair's victory, the undercard was very good.

Chris Clark: Royal Rumble. The rumble was a Ric Flair showcase and was history in the making. Thirty of the WWF's best in one ring still has an enjoyable edge to it. The entire event was solid, attracting both soft and hardcore fans. Second goes to the 20th Anniversary Clash. The old clips and old, fat wrestlers really made this event special. The matches were not all four-stars, but as a whole, the evening offered some great entertainment for the mat fan. Wrestlemania VIII gets third. The WWF production still makes its Wrestlemanias seem like monumental occasions.

Gregg Zeidler: Royal Rumble gets first mainly because of Ric Flair's amazing 60 minute performance, good interviews from both Flair and Piper, and the last good performance of Owen Hart. SummerSlam, which looked horrible on paper, but actually was very good, gets second. The booking of the Savage vs. Warrior

match was superb, and the Hart vs. Bulldog match was excellent. Third goes to SuperBrawl II. The Liger vs. Pillman match was stupendous. Everything else was good, but not great.

Robert Sears: Wrestlemania VIII was the best. The only thing that hurt the event was that Randy Savage was given the belt. Ultimate Warrior was unexpected. Royal Rumble get second because of Flair's performance and great undercard. Beach Blast with Rude vs. Steamboat and Sting vs. Cactus Jack gets third.

Jeff Cohen: An incredible WarGames puts WrestleWar on top. I am waiting to see if the Cowboy will mess up this infallible gimmick match in 1993.

Scott Dickey: SummerSlam was the best event of the year because of the two great headline matches and the great crowd.

Shawn Evans: Beach Blast was the best because it had some great matches, plus the first lady of WCW contest.

Tim Whitehead: WrestleWar gets the top spot for featuring the awesome WarGames match as well as a couple of other solid matches. The Royal Rumble was entertaining; it was great to see Flair win. SuperBrawl was a decent show, sliding into third place.

Barry Kramer: The best event was the Survivor Series, more aptly named "The Bret Hart Show." Wrestlemania VIII gets second. We liked the blood. Beach Blast gets second place because of Cactus Jack and Scotty Flamingo.

Tim Davis: The Ric Flair show, better known as the Royal Rumble, is my pick. There is nothing better than seeing Ric Flair beat up every major WWF wrestler in one night.

Rick Kemp: Besides the dream match-ups that took place and Flair finally winning the WWF Title, The Royal Rumble '92 really pushed Flair into my mind as the best worker around. Wrestling quality or not, the angles alone won this one.

Betty Schaffer: The Royal Rumble had it all—Good wrestling, excitement, and drama. Flair kept me on the edge of my seat. Wrestlemania VIII gets second followed by the Great American Bash.

Editor's Picks: Royal Rumble, SummerSlam, Beach Blast.

10. MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Paul E. Dangerously

1. Paul E. Dangerously (28%)

2. Jim Cornette (20%)

3. Ron Wright (11%)

4. Paul Bearer (8%)

5. Jimmy Hart (8%)

6-10) Madusa, Sensational Sherri, Mr. Perfect, Harley Race, Richard Lee.

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Paul E. Dangerously, Sensational Sherri, Paul Bearer.

1990: Jim Cornette, Bobby Heenan, Sensational Sherri.

1989: Jim Cornette, Bobby Heenan, Paul E. Dangerously.

1988: Jim Cornette, Paul E. Dangerously, Bobby Heenan.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Cartle Gill: Third is Jim Cornette. He's been great this year, being a wrestling personality and a promoter hasn't hurt him at all. But he was outdone by two guys. In second place is the guy who should have won this easily but somehow being a great interview and an entertaining personality doesn't cut it with Bill Watts when it comes to Paul E. Dangerously. Sneaking into first place is that cranky old Ron Wright. I have it on good authority that if he doesn't win this award, it will upset him to the point that his gout will act up again. Seriously, there isn't a character in wrestling who entertains me as much as Mr. Wright. Everyone knows someone, usually a grumpy old relative, who complains about how bad they feel. I wouldn't mind seeing him take his act to WCW for a while just to see if he could get over with a national audience.

Chris Zavisa: Jim Cornette, Paul E. Dangerously, Richard Lee. It was great to see Cornette again doing his thing, even if it meant travelling 20 years back in time. He is the

smartest and funniest person in the business today. Dangerously is a wasted talent in WCW and could be really something if they unchained him. He was outstanding for the first part of the year heading up the Dangerous Alliance. Richard Lee did a credible job with the Moondogs in Memphis and gets third.

Mark Madden: Jim Cornette, Ron Wright, and Bobby Heenan. If Jim Cornette could translate his managerial talents into wrestling skills, he'd be Ric Flair, Lou Thesz, and Bruce Baumgartner all rolled into one. When he dies, he should be bronzed. I'm not sure Ron Wright even knows something like the Torch exists. If he did, he'd probably have the big one for real. But he has to get second. His old, outdated act was so old and outdated that it came across as refreshing. A few nights of Bobby Heenan managing Ric Flair is worth a million nights of Paul E. Dangerously's tired banter. Bobby gets third.

Bruce Mitchell: 1. Jim Cornette seemed pretty inspired this year. I wonder why? 2. Ron Wright has a great gimmick. Who can't hate a whiny old person who cheats every chance he gets? Waiting to pop him out of that wheelchair is like money earning interest for SMW. 3. Percy Pringle makes a really good goofy face.

READER COMMENTS

Elyse Zois: Back from his hiatus, the master, Jim Cornette, returns to his rightful place as Manager of the Year. Second goes to his fellow SMW manager, Ron Wright, who is a total opposite of Cornette, yet still a great personality. Remember the great interviews Paul E. Dangerously did? It seems like forever since there was a Dangerous Alliance, but his mic-work was the best he's done since the Battle of the Midnight Expresses in 1988.

Rich Bowman: Jim Cornette gets first. He's a big fish in a little pond, but he could still get heat and probably a laugh from a corpse.

Rick Kemp: Paul E. Dangerously. The year began with the best managerial interviews ever which added total credibility to his team.

Tim Davis: Jim Cornette. I haven't seen a lot of SMW, but do I have to? Paul E. Dangerously's six weeks of action this past spring gets him second place. Mr. Perfect is third.

Joseph Puccio: Paul E. Dangerously gives a great interview, can get tremendous heat, and takes awesome bumps, thus gets my first pick.

Sensational Sherri really works hard and the heat she receives is incredible.

Robert Solari: Thank god for Smoky Mountain Wrestling. Ron Wright wins hands down. What else can a human being possibly come down with as an illness and still be so funny? Jim Cornette gets second place because he has been consistent all year. Paul E. Dangerously was red hot for a while, but he had too much to make up for after Watts snatched him from the road.

Tim Whitehead: Jim Cornette still walks away with this one. He's in an entire league unto himself. His work in SMW this year has been classic. I'm voting for Ron Wright for second. I know there's some question about Wright's status since he only works TV tapings, but his wheelchair gimmick is priceless and his interviews are hilarious. Paul E. Dangerously gets a somewhat disjointed third for his on-again, off-again work for WCW.

Scott Dickey: Manager of the year should be Madusa. She did her job while at ringside either interfering in matches or beating the living daylight out of Paul E. Dangerously.

Jeff Cohen: Paul E. Dangerously garnered the most realistic heat of the year with his anti-Watts tirades. Yes, Cornette did some neat stuff, but watching Paul E. was like driving by a car wreck.

Anthony Scala: Jim Cornette probably does more with the Heavenly Bodies' matches than any other manager has done during his wrestlers' matches. Cornette has always been one of the best and his SMW work continues to impress me.

Chris Clark: Mr. Perfect and Ric Flair were like gold together. Perfect is the next Ric Flair. He set him up perfectly during interviews. His ring interference was also just as a good manager's should be—absolutely perfect. Paul E. Dangerously was manic, abrasive, and all-around disturbing.

Ian Goodwin: Paul E. Dangerously was in a class by himself this year. His best move occurs when he slams his hand on the mat repeatedly only to have it reversed into a chant by the crowd for the babyfaces. Pure genius.

Robert Sears: Jim Cornette is the best manager in the business. Paul E. Dangerously is close. Jimmy Hart still does things that make you want to hate him.

Editor's Picks: Dangerously, Cornette, Wright.

11. BEST BROADCASTER

Jim Ross

1. Jim Ross (20%)

2. Bobby Heenan (19%)

3. Tony Schiavone (17%)

4. Jesse Ventura (13%)

5. Mr. Perfect (7%)

6-10) Vince McMahon, Bob Caudle, Michael Hayes, Larry Zbyszko, Dutch Mantell

PAST WINNERS: (In previous years, announcers and color commentators were separate categories)

Announcer of the Year:

1991: Ross, Schiavone, McMahon.

1990: Ross, Schiavone, McMahon.

1989: Ross, Schiavone, Lance Russell.

1988: Ross, Ventura, Russell.

Color Commentator of the Year:

1991: Heenan, Paul E. Dangerously, Scotty "The Body" Anthony.

1990: Ventura, Paul E. Dangerously, Roddy Piper.

1989: Ventura, Jim Cornette, Michael Hayes.

appearance behind the curtain at the Anniversary Clash.

Mark Madden: Bob Caudle, Vince McMahon, Tony Schiavone. Caudle, within the context of Smoky Mountain, fits into his promotion better than anyone. Same goes for McMahon within the WWF, and he has the added advantage of being the only announcer who knows exactly what the boss wants. Schiavone is polished and professional, and does a great job despite, because of his bosses, often not being sure what's coming next.

Chris Zavisla: Jim Ross, Tony Schiavone, and Bobby Heenan. Nobody in this country can hold a candle to Akira Fukuzawa of Japan or Alfonso Morales of Mexico. The best we have here is Jim "Here's Some Interesting Facts About Football" Ross. Although I must admit that he is getting increasingly hard to take as he verbally massages the butts of Bill and Erik Watts every week. Schiavone did a decent job on the syndicated package and Heenan was responsible for some classic moments on Monday night's Prime Time Wrestling, especially with the Hennig turn.

Carlie Gill: It's still Jim Ross and unless Scott Hudson returns to the announcing booth, he'll have almost no competition for this award for the rest of his career. His work on big events was a little off this year, but the big events WCW put on weren't exactly inspiring. Say what you will about his behind the scenes maneuvering or his shilling for the 900 number, when there is a big match to be called, Ross delivers the goods. Second goes to SMW's Bob Caudle who had settled in as their own Lance Russell after being out of place in WCW. Third is Tony Schiavone for his work on World Wide, but mostly for his excellent "WCW Up Close" feature.

Hennig this year rivaled Heenan with his wit on the mic. He has all the good lines and perfect timing. Not even Vince's loud voice and even louder suits could overshadow this youngster's rich style. Jim Ross gets second. His knowledge and love of the mat mayhem is clear.

Gregg Zeidler: Bobby Heenan just edges Jim Ross for the top spot. Heenan was great during Mr. Perfect's babyface turn on Prime Time Wrestling. Heenan, along with Gorilla Monsoon, are great as they made the worst matches on Wrestling Challenge entertaining. Jim Ross had a below-average year, but is still better than all other announcers. Vince McMahon gets third.

Anthony Scala: Bobby Heenan is tops. He is the most entertaining voice on the airwaves. He doesn't try to be the knowledgeable Jim Ross-type. Vince McMahon get second for his knowledge in calling the matches and his style in general. Monsoon, who works best with Heenan, gets third. Jim Ross's credibility declines more every time Ross shills for Erik Watts.

Jeff Cohen: Jim Ross is number one, Jesse Ventura is number two, and me turning down the TV and commenting myself is number three. Hey, Vince, your schtick is truly annoying. You're becoming the David Crockett of the '90s.

John Keeler: Bobby Heenan gets first. He is informative and funny. Jim Ross gets second. Too bad he's a whiner. Vince McMahon is a good broadcaster, but as a human being...

Scott Dickey: Jim Ross is the man.

Tim Whitehead: As a fan of the old Mid-Atlantic area, I've long enjoyed Bob Caudle's work. He stays calm and seems genuinely intrigued by what's going on in the ring. He's number one.

Robert Solari: Jim Ross really slid this year, so I'm going with Bobby Heenan, Mr. Perfect, and Dutch Mantell. Heenan's performance at Survivor Series put him over. Perfect really helps me deal with Vince's irritating style. Mantell has turned into a southern Jesse Ventura circa '87.

Joseph Puccio: Ross can make any match seem great, even if it is terrible. He is entertaining and informative. Mr. Perfect gets second followed by Ventura, who is not as good as he used to be.

Editor's Picks: Jim Ross, Bobby Heenan, Vince McMahon.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Bruce Mitchell: 1. For all of his faults everywhere else, Vince McMahon does an excellent job behind the mic getting his points across and has toned the obnoxious gravel voice stuff. 2. Bob Caudle fits his promotion like a well-worn shoe. 3. Jim Ross might be the best ever, but he lets his frustration spill out over the air too often. He also missed too many points during big events, such as neglecting to mention Muta's sell job of his injured knee during Starrcade or speculating on Jake Roberts's

READER COMMENTS

Robert Sears: Jim Ross is still the best in the business. He's not as great as in years past, though.

Ian Goodwin: Bobby Heenan had a career year as a color commentator. From being the perfect foil for Monsoon and McMahon to the Brain Scan telestrator to his incredible performance in the Mr. Perfect turn angle, Bobby Heenan was hilarious.

Chris Clark: Mr. Perfect was the best. Only

12. "ROOKIE" OF THE YEAR

Brian Christopher

1. Brian Christopher (53%)

2. Too Cold Scorpio (18%)

3. Dallas Page (14%)

4. Erik Watts (9%)

5. Marcus Bagwell (2%)

6-10) Bob Holly, Killer Kyle, Mike Samples, Bill Wilcox, Vladimir Koloff

PAST WINNERS:

1991: Lightning Kid, Johnny B. Badd, Jerry Lynn.

1990: Steve Austin, El Gigante, J.W. Storm.

1989: Wayne Bloom, Dustin Rhodes, Larry Cameron.

1988: Scott Steiner, Ricky Rice, Derrick Dukes.

Note: To qualify for "Rookie" of the Year, a wrestler must be a relative newcomer who is either wrestling his first year or has never been considered for this award before due to not having a prominent role or full-time schedule. For example, both Christopher and Scorpio have wrestled longer than one year, but did see their first substantial role in a promotion in 1992 and are relative newcomers.

COLUMNIST COMMENTS

Bruce Mitchell: Brian Christopher. Kinda' ironic, huh, Erik? 2. Too Cold Scorpio. Real potential here. 3. Kensuke Sasaki.

Mark Madden: Brian Christopher, Too Cold Scorpio, and no vote for third place. Christopher

was one of Memphis's most over wrestlers, combining personality and workrate. He was an easy choice. Too Cold Scorpio got second the minute he did a 360 flip at the Clash. The third choice became vacant the minute I saw Erik Watts.

Carlie Gill: Brian Christopher is first. Brian Christopher is second. Brian Christopher is third. With all respect to Brian, who is going to be a huge success, it's sad that wrestling has stagnated to the point that no other young wrestler qualified to take this award was brought along in WCW or the WWF this year. SMW isn't blameless, either. What hot young star did they bring in from the indie scene for his first full-time wrestling job.

Chris Zavisa: Christopher is a real presence in Memphis and that's rare for a rookie to pull that off. I guess he had a pretty good teacher to show him the ropes both in and out of the ring. Scorpio learned his craft from the juniors in New Japan and made an impressive debut in WCW toward the tail end of the year. Watts is terrible and does not belong anywhere near a major promotion at this stage in his career, but no other wrestlers were introduced and featured by the major promotions in 1992.

READER COMMENTS

Andy Stowell: Anyone who votes for Erik Watts ought to be immediately turned over to the I.R.S. for a full investigation for financial improprieties through the offices of World Championship Wrestling.

Jeff Cohen: Brian Christopher gets the nod. USWA's Danny Davis is a hot young property. Hey, he told me, so it must be true. In third, this Vladimir Koloff guy. An evil Russian in 1992? Generates heat almost every 20 years.

Gregg Zeidler: Brian Christopher gets first as he proved himself to be an up and coming star. Second and third go to nobody and when I actually began considering Erik Watts, I realized just how bad pro wrestling was in 1992.

Chris Clark: Brian Christopher, he must be a Highlander, because this year "there can only be one." Holy wasteland for rookies batman.

Christopher had an amazing rookie year, the likes of which hasn't been seen since Erik Watts or Dustin Rhodes. Hmmmm.

Tim Whitehead: Brian Christopher wins easily because nearly all of this year's best rookies are in Japan or Mexico. Dallas Page gets second. He has improved a lot since his debut (when he was horrible) and he seems to be trying to improve. Former WCW jobber Killer Kyle gets third for some respectable showing in SMW, and a petty good gimmick as well.

Nameless Ballot: I can't say enough about how much Brian Christopher impressed me in just six months of viewing USWA tapes. The kid has all the tools to make it big, but hopefully a major promotion can overlook his size. If you haven't seen B.C. on tape, do yourself a favor and check it out. I'm sure you will be impressed with his ring work, interview style, and his ability to get heat. You will not believe he has been around for just a year.

Elyse Zois: Brian Christopher proved if you have talent, you can get over without using your father's name and whatever other favors that entails. He is still raw, but Too Cold Scorpio has shown great promise. With no clear third place, I yield my vote to anyone you think worthy, as long as his name is not Erik Watts.

Tim Davis: Since Van Hammer didn't win last year, I refuse to recognize this award.

Robert Lee Solari: Lawler's bouncing baby boy gets it. But then, he does have a great model to follow, doesn't he? But still, he does moves his father now could only dream of doing.

Editor's Picks: Brian Christopher, Too Cold Scorpio, Dallas Page.

On the following page are categories #13-43, including the international awards. No reader comments are included with these secondary awards. The top three in each of the categories is listed. Categories #44 and #45 were suggestions for changes in next year's balloting. All of the requests sent in by readers have been recorded and will be considered next year when the 1993 Torch Year-End Award balloting begins.

SECONDARY CATEGORIES 13-43

13: Best Workrate

- 1) Ric Flair
- 2) Bret Hart
- 3) Shawn Michaels
- 4) Brian Pillman
- 5) Steve Austin

14: Independent MVP

- 1) Lightning Kid
- 2) Eddie Gilbert
- 3) Terry Funk
- 4) Dirty White Boy
- 5) Jimmy Snuka

15: Promotion of the Year

- 1) Smoky Mountain Wrestling
- 2) World Wrestling Federation
- 3) United States Wrestling Assoc.
- 4) World Championship Wrestling
- 5) Portland Pro Wrestling

16: Non-TV Promotion

- 1) World Wrestling Alliance
- 2) Eastern Championship Wrestling
- 3) Pro Wrestling America
- 4) Wrestling Independent Network
- 5) Universal Championship Wrestling

17: Sult of the Year

- 1) Jim Cornette
- 2) Vince McMahon
- 3) Kip Frey
- 4) Jim Ross
- 5) Eric Bischoff

18: Angle of the Year

- 1) Hennig's Prime Time Turn
- 2) Savage-Flair-Liz
- 3) Michaels-Jannetty Broken Glass
- 4) Roberts-Sting Mini-Movie
- 5) Sullivan Attacks Lee

19: Rising Star

- 1) Shawn Michaels
- 2) Brian Christopher
- 3) Too Cold Scorpio
- 4) Razor Ramon
- 5) Dustin Rhodes

20: Tailspin of the Year

- 1) Owen Hart
- 2) Ron Simmons
- 3) Hulk Hogan
- 4) Randy Savage

5) Michael Hayes

21: Best Weekly Show

- 1) SMW TV
- 2) WWF Superstars
- 3) WWF Prime Time Wrestling
- 4) WCW Saturday Night
- 5) USWA WMC Live

22: Most Embarrassing Wrestler

- 1) Papa Shango
- 2) Erik Watts
- 3) Van Hammer
- 4) Super Invader
- 5) Doink the Clown

23: Worst Wrestler

- 1) Erik Watts
- 2) Nailz
- 3) Van Hammer
- 4) Tony Atlas
- 5) Hacksaw Duggan

24: Announcing Team

- 1) Bobby Heenan & Gorilla Monsoon
- 2) Bob Caudle & Dutch Mantell
- 3) Vince McMahon & Mr. Perfect
- 4) Vince McMahon & Bobby Heenan
- 5) Tony Schiavone & Jesse Ventura

25: Interviews

- 1) Ric Flair
- 2) Jim Cornette
- 3) Cactus Jack
- 4) Paul E. Dangerously
- 5) Mr. Perfect

26: Underutilized

- 1) Terry Taylor
- 2) Arn Anderson
- 3) Scotty Flamingo
- 4) Jushin Liger
- 5) Bobby Eaton

27: Most Overpushed

- 1) Erik Watts
- 2) Van Hammer
- 3) Tatanka

28: Most Insulting Stereotype

- 1) Razor Ramon
- 2) Missy Hyatt
- 3) Papa Shango

4) Kamala

5) Tony Atlas

29: Best Wrestling Maneuver

- 1) Scorpio's 450 Degree Splash
- 2) Frankensteiner
- 3) Liger Shooting Star Press
- 4) Vader Powerbomb
- 5) Chono's STF

30: Worst Move

- 1) Erik Watts's STF
- 2) Crush's Headvice
- 3) Shango's Voo Doo
- 4) Spivey's Powerbomb
- 5) Demento's Kneedrop

31: Most Charismatic

- 1) Sting
- 2) Ric Flair
- 3) Rick Rude
- 4) Hulk Hogan
- 5) Bret Hart

32: Worst Angle

- 1) Shango-Ultimate Warrior VooDoo
- 2) Dangerously Fires Madusa
- 3) Martel Steals Tatanka's Feather
- 4) Spin the Wheel, Make a Deal
- 5) Erik Watts Push

33: Worst Match

- 1) Rude vs. Chono: Oct. 25
- 2) Hogan vs. Justice: Apr. 5
- 3) Todd Champion vs. Super Invader: May 17
- 4) Ron Simmons vs. Barbarian: Oct. 25
- 5) Sting vs. Halloween Havoc: Oct. 25

34: Worst Personality

- 1) Erik Watts
- 2) Van Hammer
- 3) Papa Shango
- 4) Hacksaw Duggan
- 5) Vince McMahon

35: Worst Interviews

- 1) Erik Watts
- 2) Tony Atlas
- 3) Van Hammer
- 4) Nailz
- 5) Ultimate Warrior

36: Personal Favorite

- 1) Ric Flair
- 2) Bret Hart
- 3) Ron Simmons
- 4) Mr. Perfect
- 5) Jushin Liger

37: Least Favorite

- 1) Erik Watts
- 2) Ultimate Warrior
- 3) Nailz
- 4) Papa Shango
- 5) Van Hammer

38: Japan Wrestler

- 1) Jushin Liger
- 2) Kenta Kobashi
- 3) Minami Toyota
- 4) Toshiaki Kawada
- 5) Great Muta

39: Japan Tag Team

- 1) Toyota & Yamada
- 2) Misawa & Kawada
- 3) Williams & Gordy
- 4) Hell Raisers
- 5) Furnas & Kroffat

40: Japan Feud

- 1) Liger vs. Samurai
- 2) Misawa & Co. vs. Tsuruta & Co.
- 3) Chono vs. Muto
- 4) Kobashi vs. Hansen
- 5) Hansen vs. Misawa

41: Japan Match

- 1) Toyota vs. Yamada: 8/15
- 2) Chono vs. Muta: NWA Tourn.
- 3) Toyota vs. Inoue: 5/92
- 4) Liger vs. Samuri: 4:30
- 5) Kroffat & Furnas vs. Kobashi & Kikuchi: 5/31

42: Japan Promotion

- 1) New Japan
- 2) All Japan
- 3) All Japan Women
- 4) Frontier Martial Arts

43: Lucha Libre Wrestler of the Year

- 1) Blue Panther
- 2) Konnan El Barbaro
- 3) El Canadian Vampire
- 4) Ray Mysterio Jr.
- 5) El Hijo Del Santo

PRO WRESTLING TORCH'S

10 1992'S MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

An Impromptu panel of pro wrestling journalists has compiled the first-ever list of professional wrestling's most powerful people. The list is based on the power one had as of Dec. 31, 1992. Both wrestlers and promoters are eligible for this list. Only the United States wrestling industry is considered. Just a few weeks into 1993 it became apparent that the power list will be substantially different next year with the loss of power of both Bill Watts and Jim Ross and surely more to come.

1

VINCE MCMAHON
World Wrestling Federation

POSITION: Owner
AGE: 47
YEARS IN POSITION: 9

Vince McMahon was the unanimous choice for the number-one "Most Powerful Person" in wrestling. As owner in charge of day-to-day operations of the WWF, McMahon controls what most people think is professional wrestling. His power over the media was tested in 1992 and suffered great damage. He enters 1993 with the ability to still get positive media coverage by promoting the "Headlock on Hunger" Red Cross benefit show at Madison Square Garden. His true power will be tested if reports of a U.S. Justice Department investigation lead to charges being filed against him and the WWF. McMahon showed vulnerabilities in 1992. Without Pat Patterson around, McMahon and assistant J.J. Dillon created a number-one heel Papa Shango which, along with many other factors, led to decreased business for the WWF, down over 50 percent in some areas. Outlook for 1993: Hogan could help his power, the government could hurt.

2

BILL WATTS
World Championship Wrestling*

POSITION: Vice President In Charge of Wrestling Operations
AGE: 53
YEARS IN POSITION: Less than 1

Bill Watts, as the man who ran the second largest wrestling promotion in the United States, also had tremendous power, both in terms of what the public thinks about pro wrestling and what direction pro wrestling could have taken. His initial few months as the leader in WCW were shaky at best due to showing signs of not being in touch with changes that have taken place in the last 10 years, not just in wrestling, but in the world. He surrounded himself with people who reaffirmed his beliefs rather than filling his deficiencies. "Obviously the power Watts had at the end of 1992 came to an abrupt end in February as he was demoted and then forced into resigning. Outlook for 1993: Don't expect to see Bill Watts in wrestling throughout the year. If he chooses to attempt a return to promoting, it would have to be on his own. Given his handling of WCW, he probably would not be any more successful.

3**PAT PATTERSON**
World Wrestling Federation**POSITION: Vice President of Wrestling Operations**
AGE: 52
YEARS IN POSITION: 6 (with one interruption)

Pat Patterson resigned from the WWF in 1992 amid allegations of sexual misconduct that flooded mainstream media outlets. However, Patterson has been regarded as an integral part of the growth and success of the World Wrestling Federation. Some day, a book will likely be written by someone, possibly Patterson himself, which will reveal the true influence Patterson has on day-to-day operations and the extent of his business relationship with McMahon. In the months following Patterson's resignation, there was a sense that the WWF lacked direction. Patterson returned to the WWF after the media scrutiny died down. There has never been any published report about Patterson being unhappy in the WWF or that he ever got far in planning to defect from the WWF. Patterson is liked by most wrestlers and is respected as someone who understands and appreciates details of booking. Outlook for 1993: More of the same.

4**RIC FLAIR**
World Wrestling Federation***POSITION: Professional Wrestler**
AGE: 43
YEARS AS WRESTLER: 20

There is no question that in recent years, Ric Flair's power in wrestling has been decreasing. At one point, he was probably the third most powerful person in wrestling behind Vince McMahon and Hulk Hogan. However, now that he is in his mid-40s, his years as an active wrestler are obviously nearing conclusion. As part of WCW*, not only will he be the torch-bearer for the promotion, he will likely begin to gain power politically, including how he is used and in what direction the promotion goes in upcoming months. Flair, formerly a booker for WCW, would wield potential power in a front office position in WCW or the WWF. Flair is perhaps the most recognizable wrestler in the industry today with the exception of Hulk Hogan and one of the top 10 in the ring. Outlook for 1993: As he enters WCW in February, sources say Flair does have ambitions to gain power behind the scenes. He could gain that power if Anderson and Co. fail to produce.

5**HULK HOGAN**
World Wrestling Federation**POSITION: Pro Wrestler**
AGE: 39
YEARS IN POSITION: 15

Hulk Hogan is the most powerful drawing card in the sport, still today, both in the United States and Europe. He is nearing the end of his active career it appears. Hogan does not have to wrestle often due to exorbitant amounts of money he makes through merchandising and lucrative per-date deals. Hogan has the power to return to the WWF and steal the thunder from Bret Hart and Mr. Perfect as they try to establish themselves as the WWF's top babyfaces. Hogan is only number five, though, because as of Dec. 31, 1992, he was inactive without any signs he was committed to ever wrestle again for the WWF. He also does not have the power to dictate what Vince McMahon does, although certainly he has tremendous influence. "Mr. Nanny," a movie Hogan stars in, is scheduled to be released nationally in June 1993. Outlook for 1993: If his movie does well, he will probably explore more Hollywood engagements. He will wrestle sparingly, but with impact.

6**JIM ROSS**
World Championship Wrestling**POSITION: Lead Announcer, Member of WCW booking committee.**
AGE: 41
YEARS IN POSITION: 5

Jim Ross is considered the consummate politician in wrestling. He always seems to be the right-hand man for whomever is in a power position, dating back to his early days announcing for Bill Watts's Mid-South promotion. He was in charge of the UWF's rapid syndicated network growth. At the end of 1992 he was considered one of the more influential members of WCW management, perhaps more than Dusty Rhodes, who was WCW's head booker in 1992. As the most visible announcer for WCW as play-by-play announcer for all pay-per-views and Clashes plus the WCW Saturday Night program on TBS, his announcing influences how wrestlers are perceived and if personalities get over. Outlook for 1993: We already know he has dropped off the top ten list as of February. Ross will eventually be back in a power position, but maybe not in 1993 as WCW goes in a new direction.

7**DAVE MELTZER**
Wrestling Observer Newsletter**POSITION:** Editor, *Wrestling Observer Newsletter***AGE:** 32**YEARS IN POSITION:** 10

For ten years, Dave Meltzer has gained credibility through the weekly publication of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*. Meltzer's vast knowledge of wrestling through his verbal and written correspondence with virtually every major name in wrestling for the past ten years means that when Meltzer writes something, people listen. The stroke of the keys on Meltzer's computer can make or break a career or reputation, or change the course of a push or an angle. Also, the *Observer* is read by many mainstream journalists and the *Observer* and Meltzer are often the barometer for how the mainstream press covers wrestling. Meltzer, many speculate, might some day be called upon to try his hand at being involved in the industry, although Meltzer says he plans to continue the *Observer* for another decade and has never indicated a strong interest in leaving journalism. Outlook for 1993: More of the same in an event-filled year.

8**JIM CORNETTE**
Smoky Mountain Wrestling**POSITION:** President of Smoky Mountain Wrestling**AGE:** 31**YEARS IN POSITION:** 1

At the end of 1991, a new territory was in motion. By the end of 1992, Jim Cornette's SMW, backed by a patient financial investor, has been established as a model promotion in several aspects. SMW caters to the fans in the area in which SMW is based. The SMW TV shows are considered some of the best hours of wrestling when it comes to episodic television and traditional wrestling angles. Cornette is considered one of the more knowledgeable wrestling experts. His participation in WCW early in 1993 has expanded his exposure. If the promotion he runs were seen nationally, the influence he would have over the public's perception of wrestling would be greater. As it is, he makes this top ten list because SMW has turned into a model for what many hope will be a 1990s resurgence of territorial promoting in wrestling. Outlook for 1993: Cornette will gain more power as SMW solidifies itself as a full-time regional promotion.

9**DUSTY RHODES**
World Championship Wrestling**POSITION:** Member of Booking Committee**AGE:** 47**YEARS IN POSITION:** 2

At the end of 1992, Dusty Rhodes was demoted from head booker of WCW and was joined by a committee of co-bookers, but his true demotion in power came the second Bill Watts walked into WCW offices in July. When Watts resigned, Rhodes's power increased. Rhodes does not have many options in wrestling. As a retired wrestler with an apparently irreconcilable relationship with Jim Crockett (who might start a promotion in late-1993), his only other front office option is with the WWF. Rhodes, as booker, is at times brilliant and at other times stale and repetitive. Outlook for 1993: With Ric Flair returning to WCW, a shaky past with Flair could lead to a power struggle, which because of Flair's salary and high stature as a wrestler, would likely lead to a deterioration in Rhodes's power. If Flair fails to gain power or he and Flair align together, don't look for Rhodes to be any higher than number nine on this list next year.

10**JERRY JARRETT**
United States Wrestling Assoc.**POSITION:** Owner**AGE:** 50**YEARS IN POSITION:** 14

Jerry Jarrett is the lone relic of years gone by, the last member of the famous group of over 20 territories that were surviving, many thriving, in the 1970s. He is known for extremely low payoffs, and as a result, rarely does the USWA feature more than two or three major names outside of mainstays Jerry Lawler and son Jeff Jarrett. In past years, Jarrett wielded much more power with strong national syndication and a timeslot on ESPN. Now, he barely made this top ten list. Jarrett's USWA is still seen as one of two full-time circuits where young wrestlers can gain experience. Jarrett seems content running a regional promotion with a bare-minimum payroll and drawing just enough fans to stay profitable. Outlook for 1993: It will not take much to bump Jarrett off this list next year unless he expands the USWA or the relationship with the WWF grows to more than just an occasional talent exchange.

PRO WRESTLING TORCH'S

—TOP 100—

WRESTLERS IN THE WORLD

- 1 Kenta Kobashi
- 2 Jushin Liger
- 3 Hirshi Hase
- 4 Chris Benoit
- 5 Toshiaki Kawada
- 6 Tsuyoshi Kikuchi
- 7 Ric Flair
- 8 Shawn Michaels
- 9 Rick Steamboat
- 10 Negro Casas
- 11 Big Van Vader
- 12 Bret Hart
- 13 Keiji Muto
- 14 Brian Pillman
- 15 Masa Chono
- 16 Mitsuhashi Misawa
- 17 Kensuke Sasaki
- 18 Dan Kroffat
- 19 Ultimate Dragon (Yoshihiro Asai)
- 20 Terry Gordy
- 21 El Gran Hamada
- 22 Arn Anderson
- 23 Jumbo Tsuruta
- 24 Barry Windham
- 25 Stan Hansen
- 26 Bobby Eaton
- 27 Dustin Rhodes
- 28 Masa Fuchi
- 29 Lightning Kid
- 30 Great Sasuke
- 31 Bestia Salvaje
- 32 Cactus Jack
- 33 Steve Austin
- 34 Sting
- 35 El Hijo del Santo

- 36 Brad Armstrong
- 37 Naoki Sano
- 38 Eddie Guerrero
- 39 Power Warrior
- 40 Toshiinari Ogawa
- 41 Ted DiBiase
- 42 Sabu
- 43 El Samurai
- 44 Scott Steiner
- 45 Marty Jannetty
- 46 Fuerzo Guerrero
- 47 Terry Taylor
- 48 Shane Douglas
- 49 Akira Nogami
- 50 Terry Funk
- 51 Bam Bam Bigelow
- 52 Steve Williams
- 53 Rick Rude
- 54 Eddie Gilbert
- 55 Jerry Estrada
- 56 Nobuhiko Takada
- 57 Curt Hennig
- 58 Doug Furnas
- 59 Konnan El Barbaro
- 60 Jeff Jarrett
- 61 Tom Prichard
- 62 Silver King
- 63 Randy Savage
- 64 El Dandy
- 65 Negro Casas
- 66 Genichiro Tenryu
- 67 Takayuki Iizuka
- 68 Owen Hart
- 69 Scotty Flamingo
- 70 Tommy Rogers

- 71 George Takano
- 72 Bam Bam Bigelow
- 73 Paul Orndorff
- 74 Ricky Morton
- 75 Tracy Smothers

Remainder of the Top 100... Hawk, Rick Steiner, Richard Slinger, Riki Choshu, Masa Funaki, Bobby Fulton, Davey Boy Smith, Atsushi Onita, Pirata Morgan, Doug Gilbert, Gary Young, Rod Price, Jerry Lynn, Tim Horner, Tito Santana, Robert Gibson, Big Bossman, Rick Martel, Pat Tanaka, Stan Lane, Chris Adams, Danny Davis, Ron Simmons, Tony Anthony, Johnny Ace.

Notes: Kobashi, landing in first place overall, had more first place votes than Liger, Hase, and Benoit combined... Ric Flair, rated # 2 in the 1990 *Wrestling Observer* poll, dropped to #7 (no ratings were compiled in 1991)... Terry Funk remained in the top 50, dropping from #16 in 1990. Not bad for a man approaching 50 years old... Lightning Kid, at age 20, is the youngest on the list with an impressive finish at #29... Big Van Vader is the highest rated "big man" on the list... Ted DiBiase dropped 20 spots to #41... Owen Hart, peaking at #3 in 1987, dropped to #68... Scott Steiner dropped from #15 to #44... The WWF has 10 wrestlers in the top 75 while WCW has 23 as of the end of 1992... (Compiled by an impromptu panel of journalists.)

Q

U

I

Z

BRUCE MITCHELL'S (Very Difficult) SECOND ANNUAL YEAR-END

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN HITCHCOCK

"Mr. Andy Kaufman's going wrestling,

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

—R.E.M., Man on the Moon 1992

Before the rest of the Biz joins the legendary InterGender Champion in his current resting place, either a truck stop or St. Peter's, it is time for what threatens to become a *Torch* year-end tradition: "The Year-End Quiz." We have dropped the Smart Fan portion of this evaluation because of something we discovered last year.

The final grades are in.

There are no smart fans.

I mean, you guys are a pack of dopes. Look at last year's winner, for example. When Mr. Turner graciously agreed to give up control of his wrestling business to the fan who scored the highest on the quiz, we expected some fierce competition, particularly when you factor in second prize—an original "Below the Bottom Line" manuscript autographed by Wade Keller. Oooh, what more could you want?

Well, first we could not find the guy with the best score. For some reason, H. Abrams has no forwarding address so we could not give WCW to him. Turned out that the second place winner, K.A. Frey, cheated on the Dusty Rhodes question, so we threw out his test.

That made W. Watts, a vitamin salesman from Bixby, Oklahoma, the winner by default.

And we all know how that turned out...

So, not that you clowns deserve another chance, but this year's quiz is guaranteed to be new and improved. I even took a course in tests and measurements this summer to improve the validity of this evaluation tool. So I hope you were studying this time instead of watching those damn Smoky Mountain tapes. There must be a few smart people associated with this business... somewhere.

1.

Mike Davis had an eclectic year in the Global Wrestling Federation—putting together what amounted to a multi-faceted audition tape. Pick the one way listed that Mike did not wrestle:

- a) as a Jake Roberts rip-off
- b) as a masked Jake Roberts rip-off
- c) as a Million Dollar Man rip-off
- d) as a George "The Animal" Steele ripoff
- e) as a Buggy McGraw rip-off
- f) while carrying a teenage boy in his arms
- g) without a beer gut

2.

Pat Patterson was suspended for much of the year by Titan Sports from his booking position for allegedly using his personnel power to spice up his social life. He spent most of that time:

- a) organizing Canada for Pat Buchanan's Presidential campaign.
- b) convincing Bob Dhue to hire Bill Watts.
- c) spilling his guts to the DEA.
- d) dedicating more time to his hobby writing the *Wrestling Observer* under the pen name "Dave Meltzer."
- e) booking for the WWF.

3.

Sid Justice was suspended from his statue position at Titan Sports for "unprofessional conduct." He spent most of that time:

- a) booking the WWF.
- b) making Harvey Whippleman practice peeing in that bottle.
- c) stroking a long, thick, greasy, uh, wooden bat.
- d) talking to Ole Anderson on the phone.

4.

What do Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, The Road Warriors, Sid Justice, and Lex Luger all have in common?

- a) They were all big stars in this business.
- b) They all sold a lot of tickets through the years.
- c) One or more were on the cover of 90 percent of the wrestling magazines in the last five years.
- d) They sold a lot of merchandise for both major companies.

e) The fans loved them.

f) They all quit the business at some point during 1992.

g) None of them could pass an anabolic steroid test on a bet.

h) all of the above.

5.

The following are reasons why Jim Cornette's Smoky Mountain Wrestling promotion might actually survive. Pick the major reason that it might fail.

- a) The television show actually makes sense.
- b) The interviews are the best in North America.
- c) The promotion employs the best manager in the business.



d) The promotion employs the best tag team in North America.

e) The promotion is marketed to a specific type of community.

f) They have the least amount of no-shows of any promotion.

g) They have Ron Wright.

h) The WWF, WCW, and GWF ran off most of the fans left in this country.

6.

Jim Ross, the Greatest Broadcaster in the History of the Wrestling Business, has had a storybook announcing career. Pick the one accomplishment that was the absolute pinnacle of his stellar career.

a) He became the lead announcer for the UWF—which went out of business.

b) He became the lead announcer for Crockett Promotions—which went out of business.

c) He became the lead announcer for WCW—which lost \$20 million dollars, give or take.

d) He became a color commentator for the Atlanta Falcons—who promptly had a losing season and missed the playoffs.

e) all of the above.

7.

Match the person with his actual 1992 quote listed below:

- 1) Billy Jack Haynes
- 2) Jim Cornette
- 3) Kevin Von Erich
- 4) Bill Watts
- 5) Scott Steiner
- 6) Vince McMahon
- 7) Billy Graham

a) "But if we can't take care of the little kids, who will? The homosexuals?"

b) "Newsletters represent the fans who care, the core of our audience... It's important that they point out our mistakes.

c) "Get out of my face before I kick your f-cking ass!" (hint: he said it to someone else on this list)

d) "I'm taking a shower after one of my first days on the job and this WWF executive sneaks up behind me and jams his finger up my ass."

e) "It's not about having \$20 million, it's about doing something that makes sense."

f) "(Hogan) pulled down his wrestling tights and I injected him with 600 milligrams of testosterone in his left buttock."

g) "Bruno, you were one of the top stars in the WWF. Surely you must have performed some of these sexual acts to get where you were."

8.

Former WCW V.P. Bill Watts decried the competition as a "macabre cartoon" on television, in newsletters, and in mainstream newspapers at every opportunity. What was the focal point of the main event at the first PPV Watts had total control over?

a) The pro debut of the Gold Medal winner in Greco Roman wrestling at the 1992 Summer Games.

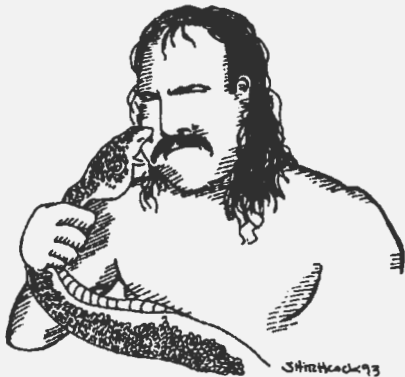
b) "The First Stampede"—a Texas death match between Terry Gordy and Steve Williams.

c) A four-and-a-half star grudge match between

Ric Flair and Ted DiBiase.

d) Jim Cornette and The Heavenly Bodies capture the Unified Tag Titles.

e) A guy jabbing a live cobra into his face hoping to get bitten.



9.

The GWF, seen on ESPN, had a rather colorful year as the third national promotion. Pick the highlight of 1992 for this up and coming young promotion.

a) The top tag team started crying on the air because "Mama had a stroke."

b) Last week's booker had a temper tantrum in the ring after setting the turnbuckle on fire.

c) A teenage boy was given a little girl's dress as a birthday present.

d) Wrestling's worst play-by-play man started doing a two bit Elvis imitation that has lasted for months.

e) Two wrestlers fought in the ring over a chainsaw (not even as good as it sounds).

10.

Brian Lee contracted to work a date in Oregon but was not allowed to wrestle by the athletic commission because his license was not in order. How was the situation handled?

a) The papers were refiled with the commission.

b) A suitable replacement was arranged to take Lee's place.

c) Lee paid a late fine in order to wrestle.

d) One of Lee's cousins identified himself on the commissioner's answering machine as he threatened to beat him up making it easier to file charges against him.

11.

Herb Abrams brought all the stars of the UWF to Spartanburg, S. Car. for a big television taping

during the summer. How did Herb celebrate another triumph for his promotion? (Hint: the question appeared in almost exactly the same form in last year's quiz.)

a) He laid out a sumptuous dinner spread for the cast and crew of the show.

b) He shook hands and thanked all of the fans leaving the building.

c) He gave the wrestlers on the show a ten percent bonus.

d) He skipped town and stiffed the locals for the cost of the arena rental and advertising.

12.

Special Philosophy Essay Question: If Tor Berg's Ladies Professional Wrestling Association put on a show on pay-per-view and no one ordered it, did it actually happen?

13.

Hardcore fans rejoiced when longtime nemesis WCW head Jim Herd finally resigned and legendary promoter "Cowboy" Bill Watts



eventually took over the reins of WCW. How did these fans show their appreciation?

a) By returning to house shows in the tens of thousands.

b) By ordering pay-per-views in droves.

c) By driving television ratings to record highs.

d) By becoming incensed when Watts failed to deliver a good product.

14.

Nineteen-ninety-two saw perhaps the sunset of the career of Hulk Hogan, the most famous

wrestler of the modern era. Hogan thanks all of his devoted fans, who made him a worldwide celebrity and millionaire many times over by:

a) leading a nationwide charity drive to feed and house the homeless.

b) spearheading a high school educational program on the health risks of steroid abuse.

c) convincing Titan Sports to lower the price of his farewell PPV to \$9.99 so that more of the "Little Hulksters" could watch him say goodbye.

d) going through the motions of a stinkbomb of a match at Wrestlemania with fellow alleged drug abuser Sid Justice.

15.

Jim Cornette sought to cement his promotions' fledgling relationship with his network of television stations by:

a) sending wrestlers to participate in local telethons.

b) running discount promotions in conjunction with those same stations.

c) running house shows regularly in markets with television.

d) allowing Lucifer's Best Pal, Kevin Sullivan, to stain the screen red with a twenty-minute public execution.

16.

WWF head Vince McMahon had a hectic 1992, what with the avalanche of publicity the Whiff received. Who was the most flattering person the mainstream media compared Vince to?

a) Walt Disney

b) P.T. Barnum

c) Captain Kangaroo

d) Hannibal Lector

17.

Special ESP Section #1: As busy as Vince McMahon was in 1992, 1993 promises to be even more hectic. What could be the most memorable part of the year for McMahon?

a) The return of Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania in the winter.

b) A big money European tour in the spring.

c) The return of Ultimate Warrior in the summer.

d) His arrest and subsequent jailing by the DEA in the fall.

18.

Special ESP Section #2: Ric Flair's return to his true home in Atlanta has revived the hopes of the hardcore fans everywhere. What will be the highlight of the return of the Prodigal Nature Boy?

- a) His capture of the NWA Title from Barry Windham
- b) His tag team with Rick Steamboat
- c) His feud with Arn Anderson
- d) His capture of the WCW Title from Van Vader
- e) His submission to the STF of Erik Watts

19.

Verne Gagne, one of the most successful promoters of the last four decades, announced a bold new athletic innovation for the nineties in the pages of *USA Today*. What was that new concept?

- a) Game show host Greco-Roman competition
- b) NFL lineman vs. Japanese Sumo wrestlers
- c) Jerry Vale on Ice!
- d) Hulkamania—*an amazingly lifelike simulation.*

20.

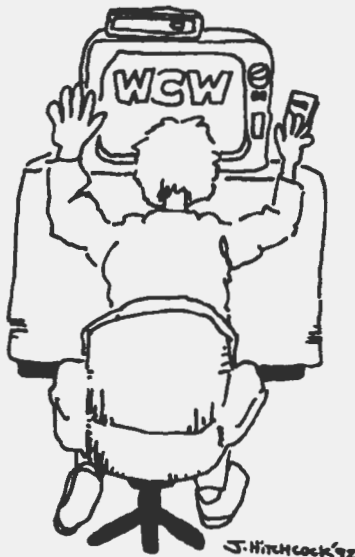
K. Allen Frey, the aggressive young corporate type who took the reins of WCW from Jim Herd, took note of the oversaturation of the wrestling product that was choking the life out of TBS's business. He immediately responded to this crisis by:

- a) scaling the WCW Saturday night show down to one hour.
- b) cancelling the TBS Power Hour and Main Event.
- c) having WCW cut back to one hour of syndication.
- d) scheduling three PPVs and a Clash in one month.

21.

Hardcore fans were revolted by Bill Watts's unwarranted mega-push of his young son Erik and reacted with horror to this obvious case of nepotism by...

- a) booing Erik Watts at the house shows.
- b) booing Bill Watts at PPVs.



- c) writing outraged letters to the *Torch*.
- d) voting Jerry Lawler's son *Torch Rising Star* of the Year.

22.

As part of WCW's self-proclaimed youth movement, Bill Watts hired the unknown but impressive Too Cold Scorpio. What was the key factor that led Watts to acquire this promising newcomer?

- a) Scorpio's innovative Lucha style.
- b) The fact that he was a fresh young face.
- c) His excellent conditioning
- d) Watts had just fired another cheap black guy.

23.

Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly passed its 200th issue during the past year. Editor/Publisher Wade Keller celebrated this milestone by...

- a) flying to Paris on the *Torch* shuttle for an intimate little dinner with Murray Hodgson.
- b) letting his mother out of the basement for an hour of sunlight.
- c) interviewing Verne Gagne for the WCW Executive Vice President Post.
- d) taping another segment of *Teen Beat* for the Global Wrestling Federation.

24.

Special MBA Case Study Essay Question: Explain why longtime WWF critic Jerry Lawler accepted a job with Titan Sports.

25.

Ambitious young promoter Tony Capone explained to *Torch* editor Wade Keller his wide-ranging plans for the NAWA during the summer. By the fall, he had made his first big move by:

- a) signing the newly released "formerly known as the Ultimate Warrior" to an exclusive contract.
- b) securing that much desired ESPN slot and the resulting national exposure.
- c) running a five-nights-a-week house shows schedule over a six state area.
- d) going bankrupt.

26.

America got to know Titan Sports owner Vince McMahon as never before. Pick the one activity from the following list that the mainstream press did not quote someone as alleging was one of Vince's past pursuits:

- a) Running red lights.
- b) Speeding.
- c) Buying and doing illegal drugs.
- d) fondling ex-convicts.
- e) covering up a murder.
- f) rape.

27.

The Global Wrestling Federation had such a cornucopia of highlights this year that one Quiz question just could not do the promotion justice. Once again, pick a highlight of the year from the following list.

- a) One of the lead faces "had his home repossessed" on the air.
- b) They held a match on a crane high enough that none of the fans or the television cameras could actually detect if anything actually happened. Then a guy jumped off with a rope around his ankle.
- c) A cheap two bit imitation of the WWF's Jamison debuted.
- d) One wrestler appeared on camera for several weeks with a Sesame Street hand puppet. Fortunately Jim Hensen had died the previous year.
- e) One of the heels paid five bucks to get his picture taken with Betty Ford alumni Kerry Von Erich.

28.

WCW head Bill "Genius in this Business" Watts took note of the avalanche of legal trouble and bad publicity that the Steroid Scandal brought Titan Sports and immediately reacted by...

- a) fine-tuning the innovative drug policy of his predecessor.
- b) cleaning house of any remaining non-athletic types.
- c) cutting more anti-steroid PSAs.
- d) pushing Van Hammer, Tony Atlas, The Barbarian, Ron Simmons, and Kensuke Sasaki.

29.

Neer Say Pay, uh, Die impresario Herb Abrams announced plans to revive the UWF television show. In his never ending quest to expand the promotion's appeal, Abrams announced plans to team Bruno Sammartino on color with what record-breaking Hollywood star?

- a) Arnold Schwarzenegger
- b) Sylvester Stallone
- c) Jean Claude Van Damme
- d) Tiny "Tip Toe Through the Tulips" Tim

30.

What gimmick went the longest toward reviving a Smoky Mountain Wrestling performer's career?

- a) The Master—Kevin Sullivan.
- b) The Commissioner—Bob Armstrong
- c) Mr. Piledriver—Paul Orndorff
- d) Mr. Piledriver—Danny Davis

31.

The *Wrestling Observer's* editor Dave Meltzer finally got his long-anticipated chance to face off on a national forum with the man at the center of the biggest scandal the industry has ever seen when he appeared on "Donahue" with Vince McMahon. When given the floor to comment, Meltzer immediately:

- a) showed copies of Federal Express shipments of steroids with McMahon's name on them to Donahue.
- b) brought out the repentant Jimmy Snuka who emotionally confessed to everything.

- c) linked McMahon to the Gotti crime family.
- d) started talking about an unrelated subject and was promptly cut off by the host.

32.

Special Math Section: Which category represented the largest total in the year 1992?

- a) the number of good matches on WCW house shows I attended.
- b) the number of plants the WWF had in the "Donahue" audience.
- c) the number of Von Erichs who committed suicide.
- d) the number of main eventers who left WCW.
- e) the number of times Cactus Jack caught his own spit.
- f) the number of ratings points WCW and the WWF lost.
- g) the percentage of merchandising business the WWF lost.

33.

GWF founder Joe Pedicino faced some long overdue criticism (ahem) in the pages of the *Torch* in 1992. Which insiders close to the mess, uh, situation jumped to his defense (and inadvertently added evidence to support the two suggested scenarios) with a barrage of faxes within 72 hours of the column's publication?

- a) fellow promoter and early GWF performer Jim Cornette.
- b) lead heel Makhan Singh.
- c) Lightning Kid
- d) co-manager Bill Eadie.
- e) three part-time employees and his self-described "close friend."

34.

What was the biggest in-ring shock this year?

- a) the return of Ultimate Warrior at Wrestlemania
- b) Ric Flair walking out third at the Royal Rumble and still winning the damn thing
- c) Jake Roberts coming out of the crowd in Baltimore
- d) the previously awful for several years British Bulldog bringing the house down with his performance at SummerSlam



35.

Papa Shango:

- a) put a curse on the Ultimate Warrior and made him barf.
- b) put a curse on the fans and made them barf.
- c) put a curse on the WWF accountants and made them barf.
- d) all of the above.

Answer Key:

(1) g; (2) e; (3) c; (4) h; (5) h; (6) e; (7) 1/d, 2/e, 3/a, 4/b, 5/c, 6/g, 7/f; (8) e; (9) c; (10) d; (11) d; (12) maybe; (13) d; (14) d; (15) all but d; (16) a; (17) b; 18 all but e; (19) b; (20) d; (21) d; (22) d; (23) d; (25) d; (26) e was just strongly implied; (27) d; (28) d; (29) d; (30) d; (31) d; (32) g; (33) e; (34) d; (35) d...

Quiz Contestants Have a Chance to Win

First Prize: A seat on the WCW booking committee.

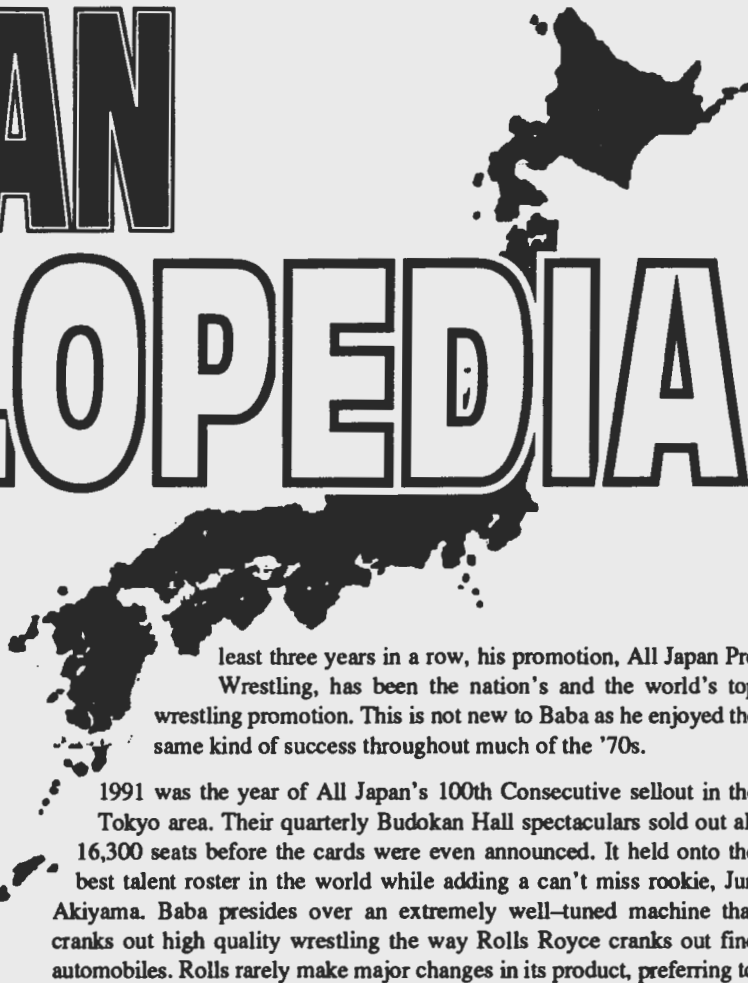
Second Prize: A seat on the WWF grand jury.

Third Prize: A photo of Bruce Mitchell.

Fourth Prize: A photo of Bruce Mitchell and Mark Madden.

1992 JAPAN ENCYCLOPEDIA

By Chris Zavisa



Wrestling promotions in Japan during 1992 proliferated rapidly. It has gotten so there is a promotion in Japan for every taste and style imaginable.

For the second year in a row, *Pro Wrestling Torch* features an extensive retrospect on the year in Japanese wrestling called "1992 Japan Encyclopedia." Again this feature is divided into three main sections. First, there is an analysis of each of the individual promotions, looking back on 1992 and ahead to what they will accomplish in 1993. Second, "Dateline: Japan" lists all significant events throughout the year in Japan including all vital information: who, what, when, and where. Third, there are a series of side-bars highlighting the tours various Japanese promotions took and which wrestlers were brought in from outside Japan for the tours.

PROMOTIONAL ANALYSIS

The promotional analysis is divided into three main categories. First, the "Big Three." These are the most successful, prestigious, and profitable companies. Second, the "Successful Niche Promotions." These are groups which are profitable by offering a different type of wrestling in scaled down promotions aimed at much narrower audiences than the leaders. Third, the "Endangered Species." This includes groups which are either losing money or are having major organizational difficulties which could spell their demise in the foreseeable future.

First, let's look at the "Big Three," both what they experienced in 1992 and what is in store for each promotion in 1993.

The Big Three:

#1, All Japan: Back in the 1960s and '70s, when basketball was far from the media favorite it is today, a man named John Wooden led UCLA to a record ten NCAA Championships in an eleven year period. Today, college roundball has its share of great coaches in Bobby Knight, John Thompson, and Dean Smith, but all of them combined could not carry John Wooden's chalk. John Wooden is the standard of excellence against which all other coaches will be forever compared.

In Japan, Giant Baba is well on his way to Woodenesque stature. For at

least three years in a row, his promotion, All Japan Pro Wrestling, has been the nation's and the world's top wrestling promotion. This is not new to Baba as he enjoyed the same kind of success throughout much of the '70s.

1991 was the year of All Japan's 100th Consecutive sellout in the Tokyo area. Their quarterly Budokan Hall spectaculars sold out all 16,300 seats before the cards were even announced. It held onto the best talent roster in the world while adding a can't miss rookie, Jun Akiyama. Baba presides over an extremely well-tuned machine that cranks out high quality wrestling the way Rolls Royce cranks out fine automobiles. Rolls rarely make major changes in its product, preferring to continually fine-tune a product that is already the standard of excellence. Baba seems to be following the philosophy that if it's not broken, don't fix it.

Last year in this space, I said All Japan's theme show could be "Everything's Coming Up Roses." This year one or two flowers in the bouquet began to wilt. Make no mistake about it, All Japan was the number one promotion in 1990 and '91 and held the same spot for all of 1992. But for the first time, a few signs of weakness began to show.

The Tsuruta team vs. Misawa team feud was in its third year and fans began to tire of it demanding something fresh and new. This has not yet translated into a loss of ticket revenue, but it is a potential problem area that could get a great deal worse.

Jumbo Tsuruta, the promotion's cornerstone, missed two monthly series with a liver ailment, including the all important Real World Tag Team tournament. It is not yet clear how extensive Tsuruta's problems are and if or when he will return to the ring. This could either be a major headache or a wonderful opportunity for Baba to make the changes that some fans have been clamoring for.

Television ratings began to dip slightly toward the middle of the year, perhaps showing the fans' lack of enthusiasm for the same old faces in the same old feuds. However, the small drop was nowhere near the level of the slide in U.S.

Baba tried to counter all of this with the undisputed elevation of Mitsuhiro Misawa to the group's number one position. Not only did Misawa finally beat Stan Hansen to claim the Triple Crown titles, but with partner Kawada now holds the World Tag Team Titles as well. Baba also added the former amateur sensation Jun Akiyama in mid-September.

Most critics look for good things from Akiyama, but it is far too soon to consider him a major force in 1993.

Baba will have to realign the group's dynamics at sometime in the near future. How soon depends greatly on Tsuruta's health and what role he is willing to play. This group's great strength has always been its sense of order and stability. Call it conservative traditionalism or sound organizational business principles, but this same strength could also be a weakness if it prevents Baba from making the changes necessary to keep them at the top spot for the next three years. A look back at the group's recent history shows that the last major change occurred three years ago when Tenryu and others jumped ship to SWS. Misawa and company were elevated to main event status and Tenryu's defection proved a

great blessing in disguise. But the impetus for the change came from the outside and was forced on Baba. It was not part of his plan and you might say he partly stumbled on the formula for his current success. How they handle their current situation will shape the promotion for some time to come.

#2, New Japan: When Avis was battling Hertz for a larger market share of the car rental business, they adopted the slogan "when you are only number two, you try harder." For the last three years Antonio Inoki's New Japan has been trying harder, but it has not yet dislodged the Giant. True, they make more money than All Japan does and their big Tokyo Dome shows are unmatched in the wrestling world. But you can throw out all of those feats when it comes to calculating who is really number one.

New Japan is in the same position in which Wilt Chamberlain found himself after playing opposite Bill Russell. A few years ago, a distinguished panel of basketball experts were asked to pick an all time NBA All Star team. Bill Russell was selected as its starting center. Chamberlain could not fathom the decision since by almost every statistical measurement, he was undeniably number one. He had scored more points than Russell. He had outrebounded Russell. He even led the league in assists one year. But when it came to selecting the best, statistics meant little and Russell was the group's overwhelming choice.

Staying with the basketball metaphor, consider that in 1991 when the buzzer sounded, the scoreboard might have read All Japan 97, New Japan 81. Baba's men kept their title. The score for 1992 might have been All Japan 92, New Japan 86. The results are still the same, but the gap has closed and New Japan is well within striking distance as the 1993 season opens.

New Japan made it closer by adding strength and interest in the middle of the card. In 1991 all their changes were at the top with the elevation of Chono, Muto, and Hashimoto. In 1992, they turned to some of the mid-card veterans who by themselves had not sold any tickets in years. They placed Shiro Koshinaka and Kuniaki Kobayashi as opponents against a rogue band of martial experts—The Karate Revolutionary Army. Led by Masa Aoyagi and newcomer Akitoshi Saito, the feud debuted toward the end of winter and by the time the seasons changed, it was the hottest thing going. Choshu booked the feud to a satisfying conclusion, then combined both warring factions into one unit called The Skinheads. The new group battled against wrestlers from Tenryu's WAR promotion in a limited series of inter-promotional matchups on each others key cards.



Giant Baba, the respected, albeit somewhat stubborn, All Japan promoter (Photo by Ross Blair)

The whole thing was even more heated than the original concept and New Japan even landed Genichiro Tenryu in the process as a bonus. While Tenryu is no youngster around whom they can build for the future, he may be just the veteran who closes the gap between #1 and #2 in the coming year.

Their August Sumo Hall series was such a financial success that it will be vastly expanded to an entire week in 1993. In fact, 1993 should see New Japan continue their trend to fewer house shows, but an upgrade into larger arenas with each show being promoted as something out of the ordinary.

In 1992, the promotion continued to have problems with their network TV time slot and for the entire month of September gave way to the Japanese obsession with golf. Their continued business relationship with Atlanta based WCW is starting to show strain as many of the group's better workers are leaving the promotion, leaving New Japan with workers they consider no better than mid-card talent. The loss of the Steiners from WCW will probably have the greatest impact in Japan since they were more popular than any other American star. Bill Watts seems more than willing to use the best of the Japanese in his promotion, but many wonder whether New Japan believes they are getting fair value in exchange.

Their early January Tokyo Dome show looks to have the most loaded lineup to date with the addition of Tenryu and Asai as well as the WCW crew and it could well serve as the kick off to making a successful run at the nation's top spot.

25 BIGGEST HOUSES IN JAPAN IN 1992

Based on tickets sold, not on announced attendance which can be inflated (*—indicates show was sold-out).

- #1: 60,000* New Japan 1/4 TokyoDome
- #2 35,000 Fujiwara 10/4 TokyoDome
- #3 20,000 FMW 9/19 Yokohama Baseball Stadium
- #4 18,000* New Japan 3/1 Yokohama
- #5 17,000 New Japan 8/23 Yokohama
- #6 16,500* UWF-I 10/23 Tokyo Budokan
- #7 16,300* All Japan 3/4 Tokyo Budokan
- 16,300* All Japan 6/5 Tokyo Budokan
- 16,300* All Japan 8/22 Tokyo Budokan
- 16,300* All Japan 10/21 Tokyo Budokan
- 16,300 All Japan 12/4 Tokyo Budokan
- #12 15,000* New Japan 5/17 Osaka
- #13 14,700 RINGS 8/21 Yokohama
- #14 14,214 New Japan 6/26 Tokyo Budokan
- #15 14,000 UWF-I 5/8 Yokohama
- #16 11,600 RINGS 12/19 Tokyo
- #17 11,500* New Japan 4/30 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* New Japan 8/7 Nagoya
- 11,500* New Japan 8/10 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* New Japan 8/11 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* New Japan 8/12 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* New Japan 11/22 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* New Japan 11/23 Sumo Hall
- 11,500* UWF-I 12/20 Sumo Hall
- #25 10,510 New Japan 12/11 Nagoya

#3, All Japan Women: AJW has the best wrestling found anywhere. It also has the best matches in the world and jams more onto a card than any other promotion. It has the single most talented wrestler in the world, plus the best tag team as well. Everyone at AJW works at a pace that no other promotion can collectively match. Their aerial maneuvers make even Lucha Libre flyers look like landlocked 300 pounders. AJW's chair shots are stiffer than any wielded by Tenryu or Kurisu. There are more highspots in a Toyota & Yamada tag team match than in most entire cards from any other promotion. When Bull Nakano and Aja Kong go into the stands, they do more damage than any wrought by Atsushi Onita. Having said all this, why is the All Japan Women's promotion ranked as #3 and not #1?

Part of the answer is historical. Women's wrestling, in any country, has always been considered a weak sister of the "real" wrestling done by the men. It certainly did not help when many women's promoters considered a good figure and dyed blonde hair as vastly more important than any true ability to work a match. If pro wrestling did evolve from the carnival tradition, then women's wrestling descended from the naughty hoochie-coochie tent.

Part of the answer is sociological. Japan is a nation that is even more male dominated than America. The changes wrought by women's liberation have yet to hit most of Japanese culture. Japanese women may control the family purse-strings, but hardly anything in the world of trade and commerce. For many years the men who dominate All and New Japan audiences looked upon the women's promotions with scorn. It did not help when most of the crowd in the '80s was row after row of young school girls in their proper uniforms, shrieking and crying to every move made by Chigusa Nagayo. The women in the world of Japanese wrestling have never been given their proper due.

Until now that is. The same young male hardcores who patronize the two larger men's promotions, compete rabidly for the right to hang from ladders at jam-packed All Japan Women shows at Korakuen Hall. Their commercial videotapes are hot, so hot that this year they were being released every three to four weeks. Their Nov. 26 show from Kawasaki sold over 5,500 tickets making it the biggest show in several years. Summer time ratings for its late night show on the Fuji network were stratospheric. It was a hot, hot year.

The one negative was the mid-year loss of Bison Kimura. Bison was the tag team partner of Aja Kong and perhaps the most beautiful woman in the promotion. Bison had the face and

DATELINE JAPAN: 1992

JANUARY:

2—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Starting out the year where they ended the previous two, another great Misawa team vs. Tsuruta team six man goes 24 minutes.

4—New Japan, Tokyo Egg Dome: Over 60,000 watch Sting and Great Muta defeats Rick & Scott Steiner, Inoki returns to defeat Hiroshi Hase, and Lex Luger defeats Masa Chono. Total gate was over \$3,700,000.

5—All Japan Women: Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Yamada and Toyota battle to an excellent 40 minute draw and Kyoko Inoue pins Hokuto in a great bout.

8—SWS, Osaka: Young hopeful Akira Katayama does a top rope dive and breaks his neck leaving him paralyzed.

9—UWF-I, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: UWF fails to sell out the usually automatic Korakuen Hall as Gary Albright starts his push to the top in a tag victory.

10—All Japan, Yatsuhiro: Another epic six-man Tsuruta vs. Misawa battle goes 26 minutes.

10—FMW, Matsudo: Over 4,200 watch Onita beat wrestling's senior citizen, The Original Sheik, in just 3:18, then the fire tossed into his face as his reward.

12—JWP, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: In what is announced as their final card, the second women's promotion draws just under 2,000 as Kadori defeats Pink Cadillac.

12—FMW, Akaho: Over 3,000 watch Onita and Sambo Asako defeat Horace Boulder and the Big Titan.

15—FMW, Kobe—Over 3,000 see Big Titan upset Onita to win the WWA Martial Arts Title, plus Sheik knifes Onita in the stomach as part of a wrestling angle.

15—Pro Wrestling Fujiwara, Yokohama: Nearly 4,000 watch Funaki and Wayne Shamrock battle to a 30 minute draw.

17—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Universal's first tour of the year starts with failure to sell out Korakuen and sells just 12,900 tickets for a total of seven dates.

19—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Drawing 4,000 to two shows the UWA Tag Team Titles change hands twice in six hours ending up in the hands of Texano and Silver King. All Japan Women wrestlers Toyota and Yamada are crowned the first UWA Women's Tag Champs.

21—All Japan, Osaka: Over 6,200 see Tsuruta defeat Kawada in a hot 20 minute contest plus Misawa defeats Masa Fuchi.

24—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Tase pins Kobashi in a 44 minute epic confrontation in the Misawa team vs. Tsuruta team feud, plus Stan Hansen destroys Kikuchi.

25—RINGS, Tokyo Bay NK Hall: Nearly 6,400 fans see Akira Maeda defeat Dick Fly as the main event of an extremely successful show.

26—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Tsuruta & Tase team to defeat Kobashi & Kikuchi in a match taped for commercial video.

28—All Japan, Chiba: Jumbo Tsuruta drops the Triple Crown Titles to Stan Hansen before nearly 4,000.

30—New Japan, Tokyo: Martial arts star Akitoshi Saito debuted destroying a bloody Kuniaki Kobayashi.

30: FMW, Osaka: Tarzan Goto pins Big Titan to win the World Martial Arts Title.

FEBRUARY:

1—All Japan Women, Takasaki: Bull Nakano & Aja Kong decimate the arena leaving almost every chair overturned to heat up their 4/25 Mariniad bout.

4 & 5—FMW, Kumamoto: Onita draws over 9,000 in two shows with ample supply of the usual blood and carnage.

5—RINGS star Akira Maeda helps film star Jean Claude Van Damme open the Tokyo debut of "Double Impact."

8—New Japan, Sapporo: Over 6,500 witness Jushin Liger taking the IWGP Jr. strap from Honaga, plus Akitoshi Saito over Ohara in another heated Karate Revolutionary Army victory.

9—Giant Baba announces at a press conference the signing of 22 year old Jun Akiyama.

9—WINGS, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: In a move people are still talking about, Matsunaga dives from the balcony over 20 feet before crashing onto the Head Hunters on the wooden bleachers.

10—New Japan, Nagoya: Over 10,000 fans see Liger pin Pegasus Kid, Muto, and Hase defend their tag straps against Norton and Armstrong, and more with the Karate Revolutionary Army.

12—SWS, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: A rare SWS sellout and decent card as Yatsu & Haku defeat Takano Brothers.

12—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen Hall: Yamada & Toyota defeated Kyoko Inoue & Hokuto in a 30 minute, three fall spectacular.

14—SWS, Kyoto: Over 5,200 see Tenryu & Hara defeat Nakano and his partner, Kitahara, who suffers knee damage from too many stiff kicks.

14—WINGS, Kitabaraki: Iceman climbs atop a basketball backboard and executes a flying cross bodyblock.

15—UWF-I, Tokyo Korakuen: Gypsy Joe shows his age when he fails to stand atop the cage and leap off against Mr. Pogo in one of the year's more pathetic moments.

21—New Japan, Tokyo: The front office plays up the rumors sweeping the wrestling press that the Blond Outlaws will jump from the promotion.

23—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Kawada & Kikuchi over Kroat & Fumas in a great match, plus Hansen & Ace win a brutal bout over Misawa & Kobashi.

24—Fujiwara, Tokyo Korakuen: A sellout crowd watches a 40 minute marathon as Funaki eventually defeats Wayne Shamrock by submission.

25: New Japan, Tokyo: In a vote of the promotion's wrestlers, Masa Chono is named as the group's best worker and GONG magazine names Mitsuhiro Misawa as Japan's most popular wrestler in its 400th issue.

27—All Japan, Matsumoto: Four singles matches between members of the Tsuruta vs. Misawa teams have Misawa's men triumph 3-to-1.

MARCH:

1—All Japan, Higashiosaka: At one of their rare cards filmed for home commercial video, the Misawa six-man team defeats Tsuruta and company in 27 minutes.

1—New Japan, Tokohama: One of the year's largest audiences of over 18,000 watches retired veterans Inoki, Kotetsu, Yamamoto, and Strong Kobayashi plod through various exhibition bouts.

4—All Japan, Budokan Hall: 16,300 see Stan Hansen keep the Triple Crown pinning Misawa in 19 minutes, plus Gordy & Williams lose the PWF World Tag Team Titles to Tsuruta & Tase in 31:18.

5—RINGS, Amagasaki: Over 5,100 see Akira Maeda down Buzaryashvili Ramazi from what used to be the Soviet Union.

6—All Japan, Hiratsuka: Another super Tsuruta vs. Misawa six-man that goes 25 minutes with Tase pinning Kikuchi.

7—Universal, Yokohama: UWA kicks off another six-man tournament as Los Brazos defeat Hamada & Caras & Kendo.

7—All Japan Women, Tokosuka: Toyota & Yamada over Hotta & Minami in a 5-star classic and best tag team bout of the year.

8—WING, Tokyo Korakuen: Pogo beats Matsunaga in a bunkhouse death match with a barbed wire baseball bat plus throws a fireball for good measure. All Japan Women steal the show as Kong & Kimura defeat Hokuto and Kyoko Inoue in 17:00.

9—New Japan: Kyoto: A crowd of 9,000 watches the debut of The Outlaws under new hoods and the Karate Revolutionary Army feud continues to draw incredible heat.

13—WING, Shizuoka: Iceman and Perez have a unique scaffold match on a small elevated crane platform over a truck.

14—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: Masa Michinoki dazzles the sellout crowd with high risk maneuvers to become their top native star and the tournament is won by Hamada & Caras & Santo.

17—UWF-I, Tsuyuhashi: Albright defeats Yamazaki before 3,800 to continue his push to the top plus Takada over Steve Day.

20—Fujiwara, Miami, Fla.: Fewer than 2,000 see strong style in America as Bart Vale defeats Fujiwara and Shamrock over Suzuki.

20—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Start of the

Carnival singles tourney with a hot one as Kawada defeats Kobashi, plus Kikuchi steals the spotlight with some incredible bumps in a tag main event.

22—SWS, Tokyo Korakuen: Battle Hall VIII does well at the gate with a sellout, but the matches are less than mediocre and fan dissatisfaction grows with the promotion.

24: FMW, Sawara: Former World Heavyweight boxing champ Leon Spinks debuts knocking out Sambo Asako in just 87 seconds.

25: FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: Spinks KO's Tarzan Goto to win the World Martial Arts Title, plus Eriko Tsuchiya pins Miwa Sato to win the women's WWA World Title.

26: RINGS, Tokyo: Over 8,500 view a five minute exhibition match involving Maeda while the rest of the card is dominated by shoots.

31: All Japan, Toyama: Another hot tourney dream match has Tase upset Kawada in 17 minutes before more than 4,300.

APRIL:

2—All Japan, Yokohama: Tsuruta & Misawa have a great 30 minute draw as part of the continuing Carnival tournament.

3—JWP, Tokyo Korakuen: The return of the second women's promotion has Devil Masami pinning Harley Saito and a solid tag match with Suzuki & Ozzaki defeating Kansai & Fuoka.

5—WING, Tokyo Korakuen: Mr. Pogo & Super Invader defeat Tokuda & Kanemura in a barbed wire death match and afterward Pogo destroys Matsunaga.

6—All Japan, Osaka: Two hot tournament matches before more than 6,400 as Hansen defeats Kawada and Tsuruta pins usual partner Masa Fuchi.

7—FMW, Ibaragi Air Force Base: Onita does what he does best—getting publicity—with a free show for members of the Japanese Self Defense Force.

8—WING, Yokkaichi—Pogo stabs Matsunaga with a broken beer bottle which requires 12 stitches at a local hospital.

9—WING, Kounan: A bunkhouse death match involving Pogo vs. Kanemura spills into the street, plus Kevin Sullivan joins in emptying the arena.

11—JWP, Tokyo Korakuen: Opening the top of the Junior III Tourney starts out hot with El Samurai pinning Jushin Liger.

17—SWS, Yokohama: Ric Flair pins Tenryu and sends him to the hospital for stitches. Natural Disasters win tag belts from Yatsu & King Haku.

18—SWS, Tokyo Gym: Tenryu wins a three fall bout from Ric Flair before 7,000 in a poor 21 minute bout. Disasters drop tag belts back to Yatsu & Haku.

18—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Fan Appreciation Night has a 67 minute epic struggle eight-man Misawa team vs. Tsuruta team bout with Misawa & Kawada the winners. Kobashi works 56 minutes of bout.

19—Fujiwara, Tokyo Gym: More than 8,600

body of a movie goddess.

Number three is going to have to be enough for the time being since the group is locked into a set of realities which will be extremely difficult to overcome. AJW cannot put on the big shows at places like Sumo Hall and Budokan that the men periodically do. This denies the wrestlers the big payday and media attention that goes with the big shows. AJW may do well in a late-night timeslot, but no network executive considers AJW ready for prime time. AJW could clearly do better by almost any measurement than the men's promotions outside of New Japan and All Japan. Only Onita sells more tickets, but his overall rating is hurt by what he himself admits is "garbage wrestling."

1992 PROMOTIONAL SERIES: ALL JAPAN

Wrestling in Japan is not done on a U.S. style schedule with promotions active every night of the year. Most of the larger promotions operate a nightly schedule for about three weeks, then take off from two-to-four weeks before starting again. This does not preclude the occasional show that occurs in between two series. Several promotions like to have "fan appreciation nights" which are held after the series is over and use no imported talent. The following is a list of tours and imports.

1/2-1/28: "92 New Years Giant Series"—Imports: Stan Hansen, Johnny Ace, Joel Deaton, Billy Black, Tommy Rogers, Bobby Fulton, The Youngbloods, Scott Armstrong.

2/22-3/6: "92 Excite Series"—Imports: Hansen, Ace, Terry Gordy, Steve Williams, Doug Furnas, Dan Kroffat, Joel & Dean Malenko, Andre the Giant.

3/20-4-17: "92 Championship Carnival"—Hansen, Ace, Dan Spivey, Williams, Gordy, Kroffat, Furnas, Abdullah the Butcher.

5/16-6/5: "Super Power Series"—Imports: Gordy, Williams, Patriot, Kroffat, Furnas, Rogers, Fultons, Hansen, Ace, Andre.

7/4-7/31: "Summer Action Series"—Imports: Hansen, Ace, Patriot, Black, Youngbloods, The Destroyer.

8/20-9/9: "Summer Action Series II"—Imports: Gordy, Williams, Spivey, The Patriot, Fantastics, Kroffat, Furnas, Hansen.

10/2-10/21: "Giant Series"—Imports: Hansen, Gordy, Williams, Ace, Spivey, Abdullah, Kroffat, Furnas, Andre, Patriot.

11/14-12/4: "92 Real World Tag Team League"—Imports: Gordy, Williams, Hansen, Ace, Kroffat, Furnas, Dory Funk Jr., Patriot, Abdullah, Deaton, Black.



Ed Farat, The Original Sheik, a major competitor in FMW (Photo by Gary Kamensack)

Successful Niche Promotions:

#4: FMW: In his first year of operation, Onita would frequently cry crocodile tears in the ring begging the fans forgiveness for being a garbage promotion. Onita freely admitted that he and his crew could not wrestle like New or All Japan, but tried to make up for it with truckloads of blood, sweat, and tears. The fans did not seem to care that the athletic aspect of wrestling was not there. They loved the gore and mayhem so Onita's tears turned into stacks of cash.

For Onita, 1992 was an important year. Many believed he would need to build up the wrestling quality in order to survive. Ed "The Original Sheik" Farhat was the main heel in FMW and had to be replaced by a younger man who could go toe-to-toe with Onita in all gimmick bouts. Onita opened the bank vault and signed legendary madman Tiger Jeet Singh of superstar status in Japan. He virtually did nothing else during the year other than add Singh, but it was enough. Attendance stayed strong, dollars kept rolling in, and the "sold-out" sign was frequently posted at arena box offices.

Dave Meltzer describes FMW as a "niche promotion." It is an apt description since Onita followed the classic capitalistic philosophy of making money by giving people what they want. No other promotion was doing bloody carnage so Onita filled that niche.

In 1992, Onita probably went through more barbed wire than most cattle ranchers in Wyoming. An FMW main event that did not advertise some type of barbed wire death match gimmick was rare. Foreign imports like Sabu returned stateside looking like Rand-McNally

watch Fujiwara defeat Flynn and Suzuki defeats Wayne Shamrock. Funaki defeats a fat and lazy Roberto Duran in a huge disappointment.

19—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Part two of Fan Appreciation Night has a hot 36 minute Misawa vs. Tsuruta six-man that finishes with Kobashi pinning Masa Fuchi.

23—FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: Onita drops Sabu throat-first onto barbed wire and later Sabu gets his head tied up hanging himself in the sharp stuff in a tag team bout.

25—All Japan Women, Yokohama: Their third annual Wrestlemarinpiad plays to a crowd of 4,200 and has Bull Nakano pin Aja Kong, Bison Kimura over Toshiyo Yamada, and Minami Toyota in a five-star classic defeating Kyoko Inoue to claim the IWA Title.

29—All Japan Women, Toda: Mariko Yoshida wins the Japanese Title over Takako Inoue, Toyota & Yamada defend the titles in a great win over Kyoko Inoue and Hotta.

30—New Japan, Sumo Hall: 11,500 watch Jushin Liger win the Junior tournament defeating El Samurai in a great 21 minute bout.

MAY:

1—New Japan, Chiba: Choshu beats Norton to keep IWGP Title before 7,500, plus Bigelow & Vader keep the tag belts over Muto & Hase.

2—FMW, Hiroshima: A big crowd of 5,952 watch Onita defeat the Sheik in a barbed wire match in just 4:41.

3—FMW, Osaka: Sheik throws fire at Sambo Asako at an outdoor show attended by more than 4,000.

6—FMW, Hyogo: Continuing a great week at the gate, Onita's men draw over 5,000 for their infamous Ring of Fire bout that nearly burns down the house and badly injures Ed Farhat.

7—All Japan Women, Fujioka: Bull Nakano returns from a three week absence nursing injuries from the Marinpiad and defeats Suzuka Minami.

8—UWF-I, Tokohama: Takada and company get the big payday in front of more than 14,000 as Koji Kitao, every hardcore's favorite wrestler, defeats Yamazai, and Gary Albright KO's Takada. Former boxing champ Matthew Saad Muhammad loses to Tamura in a quick 34 seconds.

15—Fujiwara, Osaka: Don Nakaya Neilsen beats Fujiwara in just 67 seconds and Bart Vale KO's Wayne Shamrock.

16—RINGS, Tokyo: Over 10,000 witness Akira Maeda KO over Hank Neumann in 5:24.

16—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Japanese debut of The Patriot is a big success as he joined Johnny Smith in losing to Tsuruta and Taue.

16—FMW, Los Angeles, Calif.: Change it to "Reports of a five star match spread across the nation as Onita invades La La Land teaming with Mexican legend El Hijo Del Santo and Tarzan Goto defeating three American wrestlers.

17—New Japan, Osaka: 15,000 pay to see Inoki return teaming with Hase to defeat Rheingans & Rambo, Choshu keeps strap defeating Muto,

Liger over El Samurai. Meanwhile, in Jacksonville, Fla., Takayuki Iizuka is getting mugged by the Steiner Brothers.

21—All Japan, Sapporo: Another great Misawa vs. Tsuruta six-man goes 36 minutes before a big crowd of 6,600.

21—New Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Signs of fan indifference as they fail to sell out Korakuen in what used to be automatic.

22—All Japan, Sapporo: Another five star six-man Tsuruta vs. Misawa that goes 35 minutes.

24—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: Bull Nakano keeps title defeating Toshiyo Yamada, plus Kong & Kimura beat Mita & Hokuto.

24—FMW, Tokyo: Onita reclaims the title defeating Leon Spinks before a crowd of 7,000.

25—New Japan: Tokyo Korakuen: Learning from their previous mistake, New Japan puts on a hot show selling out the building as Iizuka & Nogami upset Liger & Muto in a great match.

31—FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: Onita tries to cash-in with mainstream publicity by debuting tell-all sportswriter Shoji Nakamaki.

JUNE:

2—New Japan, Hiroshima: Costumed fantasy with Samurai & Pegasus beating Liger & Tiger Mask before 6,400.

4—WINGS, Omiya: Head Hunter splashes Yukihiro Kanemura off the top of the cage and he misses the rest of the tour with rib injuries.

5—All Japan Women, Asahikawa: Kyoko Inoue beats Bison Kimura to win the All Pacific Title.

5—All Japan, Tokyo Budokan: 16,300 pack every corner of the big building and watch as Stan Hansen beats Kawada to keep his Triple Crown and Tsuruta & Taue keep their World tag belts defeating Misawa and Kobashi in a heated contest.

5—SWS, Tokyo: The split in the promotion becomes very public as the card is divided into two sections, one with NOW wrestlers and the other with WAR wrestlers.

9—Aoyagi, Nagoya: Martial arts star Aoyagi goes to a 17 minute draw with New Japan star Kuniaki Kobashi to further heat up the Karate Revolutionary vs. New Japan feud.

11—WING, Tokyo Korakuen: A rare good match in WINGS rings as a six-man tag goes six falls over 21 minutes and the fans flood the ring in stunned appreciation.

13—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: First of seven Japanese dates draws 2,000 fans and keeps the fledgling promotion alive.

21—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: Gran Hamada is cut open the hard way as a fan throws a chair into the ring and gashes him. Universal averaged 1,530 customers during the tour.

21—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: Toshiyo Yamada pins partner Minami Toyota in one great contest plus Nakano & Hokuto team to defeat both Inoues.

25—FMW, Sapporo: Sheik pins Onita to become the oldest pro wrestling champion on the planet before a crowd of over 6,500 in a

barbed wire death match with outside help from Tiger Jeet Singh.

25—RINGS, Sendai: Maeda downs Hans Nyman of Holland plus a variety of shoots before a crowd of 4,300.

26—New Japan, Tokyo Budokan: El Samurai wins the Jr. strap from Jushin Liger, Sasaki returns and loses to Hase, and the Steiners win the tag belts from Vader & Bigelow in front of 14,214.

28—UWF-I, Hakata: Gary Albright defeats Tom Burton and Yamazaki defeats Steve Day.

30—FMW, Gifu: A jungle death match with Singh pinning Onita in a rain-drenched, exploding barbed wire match which also has the Sheik throwing fire at Onita.

JULY:

1—All Japan: Jumbo Tsuruta sits out the July tour with liver problem. Giant Baba attempts to replace him in tag matches.

5—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: Toyota pins Aja Kong in a great match, Kyoko Inoue and Mariko Yoshida battle to a 30 minute draw.

5—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Kobashi & Kikuchi over Fuchi & Ogawa in a super hot match and match of the year candidate in 31 minutes.

8—New Japan, Tokohama: More than 5,000 watch Hiro Hase again beat up his former partner Sasaki, Tatsumi Fujinami returns with a boxing gimmick and defeats Richard Byrne in five rounds.

8—All Japan, Aomori: Tase & Fuchi defeat Kawada & Kikuchi in a 20 minute match in 90 degree heat.

12—UWF-I, Shizuoka: Takada beats Steve Cox and Albright & Silver win a tag bout over Yamazaki & Tamura in 18 minutes.

14—WAR, Tokyo Korakuen: Masao Orahara returns from Mexico teaming with Tenryu in a hot bout losing to Kabuki and Kitahara and has to be hospitalized after the bout.

15—All Japan Women, Tokyo: Tag champs Toyotoma & Yamada defeat Kong & Kyoko Inoue in a three fall match, Nakano over Hokuto, and Hasegawa wins the Japanese Title from Mariko Yoshida.

16—WING, Hamamatsu: The second round of the Fire Tournament opens plus Pogo uses a barbed wire wrapped baseball bat on Matsunaga.

19—FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: Jeet Singh attacks a female prelim wrestler breaking her open, then attacks several audience members for good measure.

21—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Fifth Annual Bruiser Brody night spices up a mediocre July tour with Misawa injuring his shoulder against Tase providing some good dramatic spots.

25—WINGS, Nagayo: Matsunaga pins Kevin Sullivan in the fire tourney semi-finals, then is destroyed by Pogo in a brutal post-match angle.

26—Oriental, Kotohira: Ryuma Go's new promotion opens as a free show at a summer carnival using talent from the Portland-based Championship Wrestling USA promotion and

Korea.

27—Fujiwara, Hakata: Several major line-up changes are announced and hurt attendance. Funaki over Vale in 30 minutes, plus Suzuki over Duane Koslowski.

31—New Japan, Sapporo: Over 6,500 watch Shiro Koshinana return from a suspension and lose to Chono. Choshu pins Machine to keep his title.

31—All Japan, Matsudo: Stan Hansen pins Tase to keep the Triple Crown straps and Misawa & Kikuchi over Fuchi & Ogawa.... SWS folds its tent as Yoshiaki Yatsu and Takano Brothers make a public break, criticizing owner Hachiro Tanaka of Megame Super Optical. Yatsu then files a breach of contract suit against Tanaka for the three years left on his contract.

AUGUST:

7—New Japan, Nagoya: 11,500 pack the Rainbow Hall for Round One of the NWA singles tournament. Rude, Sasaki, Taylor, and Hashimoto are all winners, plus Liger & Samurai defeat Benoit & Honoga in the night's best bout.

10—New Japan, Sumo Hall: Another crowd of 11,500 watches Sasaki, Rude, Muto, and Chono advance to the next round of NWA tourney.

11—New Japan, Sumo Hall: The best night of the tournament has Rude beating Sasaki and Chono over Muto to set up the finals. Again, 11,500 in attendance.

11—FMW, Osaka: Toyoda and Kudo win the right to represent FMW against the All Japan Women team on the Sept. 19 baseball stadium show.

12—New Japan, Sumo Hall: Chono wins the NWA Title beating Rick Rude in a four-and-a-half star bout before 11,500. Steiners beat Muto & Sasaki, and Pegasus gives Liger a powerbomb off the top rope.

13—WAR, Tokyo Korakuen: Fan appreciation show has Tenryu utterly and completely destroy Orihara in four rounds.

14—UWF-I, Sapporo: Badnews Allen debuts and submits to Albright before a crowd of 5,500.

15—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: An all-around great card is topped by the best singles match of the year: Minami Toyota defeats partner Toshiyo Yamada forcing her to submit to getting her head shaved.

15—New Japan, Kobe: A crowd of 8,300 watches the fireworks explode with the Shinheads, plus the Steiners keep the tag titles defeating Bigelow and Norton.

15—WINGS, Kawasaki: Mil Mascaras and El Canek got a double-DQ in a "dream match," Headhunters beat Pogo & Matsunaga in a wild arena brawl.

16—New Japan, Fukuoka: The Great Muta wins the IWGP World Title defeating Riki Choshu before 9,000. In six shows, over ten days New Japan sold 63,000 seats.

16—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: Bulldog KT & Pat Tanaka win the UWF Intercontinental tag team titles in a one-night tournament beating Cooly SZ and Kendo in the finals.

17—JWP, Tokyo: In a weird show which begins at 1:30 a.m. and goes until 5 a.m. and taped for

had drawn highway maps across their skin. Onita racked up frequent flyer miles at local hospitals. It was exactly the identical formula that Onita had used in 1990 and 1991. And there's no use wasting any more space on it, it is exactly the same formula he will use in 1993.

#5: UWF-I: And speaking of niche promotions, we have the three strong style groups, UWF-International, RINGS, and Fujiwara Family. All three are merely the latest incarnations of the old UWF which in the mid-'80s shook the pro wrestling establishment to its foundation. They favor heavy doses of reality which comes disguised as matwork, submission moves, and martial arts kicks. In 1991, Akira Maeda's RINGS was the best of the bunch, but this year the UWF-I has eclipsed RINGS to become the number one strong-style promotion and number five overall.

In October, they sold out Tokyo Budokan Hall and 16,500 watched Nobuhiko Takada defeat wrestling's surly nomad, Koji Kitao. At other

1992 PROMOTIONAL SERIES: NEW JAPAN

Tours and List of Imported Wrestlers:

1/30-2/12: "92 Fighting Spirit"—Imports: Bam Bam Bigelow, Scott Norton, Tony Halme, Johnny Rambo, Brad Armstrong, Chris Benoit, Tony St. Clair.

3/1-3/11: "Big Fight Series"—Imports: Big Van Vader, Bigelow, B. Brian Blair, The Samoans.

4/18-5/1: "Explosion Tour"—Imports: Norton, Halme, Cameron, Benoit, Negro Casas, Finlay, Eddie Guerrero.

5/17-6/3: "Crush the Super Heavy"—Imports: Vader, Halme, Benoit, Brad Rheingans, Brad Armstrong.

6/18-7/8: "Master of Wrestling"—Imports: Vader, Bigelow, Norton, Kokina, Benoit, Rick & Scott Steiner.

7/16-7/31: "Summer Struggle"—Imports: Bigelow, Norton, Halme, Armstrong.

8/6-8/16: "Grade One Climax"—Rick Rude, Barry Windham, Arn Anderson, Steve Austin, Terry Taylor, Bigelow, Steiners, Benoit.

9/10-9/23: "Battle Autumn"—Imports: Halme, Norton, Rheingans, Kokina.

10/8-10/21: "Super Grade Tag Team League"—Imports: Bigelow, Norton, Halme, Benoit, Dean Malenko.

11/10-11/23: "Wrestling Scramble"—Imports: Norton, Halme, Benoit, Sting, Steiners.

12/1-12/14: "Battle Finale '92"—Imports: Hawk, Rheingans, Halme, Norton, Jim Neidhart, Guerrero.

shows, they regularly sold between two and seven thousand high-priced tickets. UWF-I brought in Gary Albright who got UWF-I through the middle of the year and introduced Dan Severn who could be a major player in the strong-style.

They captured the attention of the Japanese

1992 PROMOTIONAL SERIES: WAR, WINGS, UNIVERSAL

Wrestling and Romance:

9/11-9/15: "Kaku Mei Ten Ka"—Imports: Flair, Animal, Undertaker, Negro Casas.

10/18-10/23: "Kaku Mei Ten Ka III"—Imports: Owen Hart, Koko B. Ware, Berserker, Pierroth Jr., Xavier Cruz.

11/26-12/1: "Kaku Mei Jishin"—Imports: Haku, Berserker, Guerrero del Futuro.

WINGS

2/9-2/16: "Be Dreamers"—Imports: Dick Murdoch, Iceman, Gypsy Joe, TNT, Head Hunters.

3/6-3/13: "Who's the Danger"—Imports: Ivan Koloff, Head Hunters, Miguel Perez Jr., Rip Rogers.

4/5-4/9: "Desire for Blood"—Imports: Kevin Sullivan, Kamala, Joe, Mongolian Mauler, Super Invader.

5/5-5/7: "Dead or Alive"—Imports: Wahoo McDaniel, Grappler, Jason.

6/4-6/12: "Climbing Up"—Imports: Chetah Kid, Joe, Dundee, Hunters.

7/17-7/25: "Caution"—Imports: Sullivan, Jason, Eric Embry.

8/14-8/24: "Be Ambitious"—Imports: MH; Mascara, El Canek, Jason, Hunters.

9/18-9/27: "West End Story"—Imports: Hunters, Jason, Joe.

10/28-11/10: "New Enemy Coming"—Imports: Hunters, Sullivan, Leatherface, Backlund, Joe.

12/9-12/20: "We Love WING"—Imports: Leatherface, Jason, Terminator, Grappler, Miguel Perez Jr.

Universal:

Since Universal Uses Nearly 80% Foreign Talent (Including Lightning Kid, Jerry Lynn), Only the Series Dates Are Listed.

1/17-1/23: "Feliz Ano Nuevo '92"—Champions Night."

3/7-3/14: "Gran Estrella '92."

4/19: "Estrella en April."

6/13-6/21: "Super Estrella."

8/15-8/21: "Estrella de Verano."

9/4-9/11: "Fantastico Estrella."

11/19-11/27: "Ultimo Estrella."

wrestling press with a demand by Lou Thesz to have the other promotions defend their titles against UWF-I Champion Takada. Taking it much further than the usual promotional breast-beating, UWF-I officials invaded New Japan offices in November and forced a reluctant Riki Choshu to at least go through the motions of negotiations. When it was made public that New Japan wanted nearly a quarter-million dollars just to allow UWF-I in a battle royal, it made them appear as greedy grubbers while Tanaka and company appeared to be true athletes.

Watch for Gary Albright's big push to come to an end as newcomer Dan Severn climbs to the top as the group's top import. If Sano is serious about coming in, it could strengthen their talent roster considerably and provide some fresh match-ups.

#6 RINGS: ABC ran a made-for-TV movie ten years ago called "Mazes and Monsters." It was a Dungeons & Dragons rip-off that featured Tom Hanks in a tale about college kids who love to escape the pressures of the real world by spending hours at the role-playing game which allowed them to reshape their world and be whatever they wanted to be. One of the players becomes such a fanatic that he drops out of life and mentally retreats to his own permanent fantasy world. His parents and friends are aghast, but he is as happy as a clam in mud.

In Japanese pro wrestling, Akira Maeda is the clam. He has sampled what goodies the rest of the world has to offer, rejected them as phony, and lives in his own safe little construct. He makes money at this. Lots of money. His shows, which are run on the average of one every four-to-five weeks, generate more merchandising revenue than any other promotion per ticket sold.

Three or four times a year he will move into larger arenas similar to the Aug. 21 Yokohama one that played to nearly 15,000. He uses a collection of foreign imports that would be hard-pressed to draw even a small crowd by themselves.

If you want a sneak preview of the 1993 new model of RINGS just pop any of the RINGS shows from 1992 in your VCR. It really doesn't matter what show you select. RINGS is Maeda and Maeda is RINGS. It's just that simple.

The Endangered Species:

#7: WAR (Wrestling and Romance): Two years ago Hachiro Tanaka raided the big promotion and tried ever so hard to be one of the big boys. SWS had huge aspirations but very little on delivery. One year ago, SWS was

TV Masami & Ozaki defeat Kansai & Suzuki in a four-star, 25 minute battle.

19—Lou Thesz announces his backing of the UWF-I Champion as the rightful World titleholder and will present his famous belt to the winner of the Aug. 28 Albright vs. Takada bout.

20—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Jumbo Tsuruta returns from his liver illness and participates in another hot six man bout vs. the Misawa team.

21—RINGS, Yokohama: 14,700 ante up over one million dollars at the gate to see Maeda win by submission over Andrei Kopielov.

22—All Japan, Tokyo Budokan: Mitsuha Misawa finally claims the grand prize after a decade of work as he defeats Stan Hansen before 16,300 in a 24 minute battle for the Triple Crown.

22—FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: Onita & Asako & Ultraman over Sabu & Tyton & Spicoli in a bloodbath barbed wire death match.

28—UWF-I: Tokyo Korakuen: Albright again defeats Allen by submission. New Japan had threatened legal action but decided Allen was not worth fighting over.

29—LLPW, Tokyo Korakuen: Noriyo Tateno & Harley Saito defeat Miki Hanada & Joseki in a 33 minute match.

30—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: On an even better card than their Aug. 15 show, Aja Kong defeats Toyota to claim the top prize in the Grand Prix Tournament. Mariko Yoshida has two great matches against Toyota and Kyoko Inoue.

SEPTEMBER:

1—FMW, Sendai: Onita makes his weekly trip to the hospital after Singh injures him in yet another barbed wire death match.

4—Fujiwara, Sapporo: An unusually small strong-style crowd sees Suzuki and Wayne Shamrock battle to a 30 minute draw.

5—All Japan, Kagoshima: Hot TV taping with Gordy & Williams beating Kobashi & The Patriot and still another four-star Misawa team vs. Tsuruta team effort.

7—FMW, Toda: Onita is stretchered away after Singh destroys the cast on Onita's injured knee in another barbed wire death match.

9—All Japan, Chiba: Kawada beats Taue and Ogawa beats Kikuchi to win title shots at the next Budokan show.

9—Universal, Sapporo: The largest crowd of the tour (3,850) see a several fall, eight-man elimination match and Lasser recapturing the UWF lightweight belt over Ricky Santana.

10—WINGS, Tokyo Korakuen: Gypsy Joe loses a "loser must retire" cage blood bath to Mr. Pogo, retires, then spends the rest of the month wrestling on every WINGS card.

10—New Japan, Osaka: Skinhead feud heats up with two hot bouts running together, plus Chono over Sasaki in a super 30 minute match.

11—All Japan Women, Morioka: Kong & Hasegawa get upset win over Toyota & Yamada in a non-title tag bout and Minami Toyota breaks her foot.

15—WAR, Yokohama: A loaded show draws nearly 10,000 to see Flair and Tenryu battle to a double-countout, Asai pins Casas, and Aoyagi beats Orihara.

15—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: Honoring Bull Nakanos tenth anniversary of entering training camp, Hokuto defeats Minami, and Nakano heads up the winning team in a six-person tag.

17—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Fan Appreciation Night has Baba filling in for Tsuruta in a six-man tag defeating the Misawa team in a very good 26 minute contest.

19—FMW, Yokohama: A crowd announced at 30,000 turns out to be more like 18,000 and sees Onita pin Jeet Singh in an electrified barbed wire death match with land mines. Best bout of the card is the All Japan Women's team of Nakano & Hokuto triumphing over FMW women Kudo & Toyoda. Afterward, Onita gets 54 stitches in his back at a hospital.

21—UWF-I, Osaka: Takada wins the title defeating Gary Albright in a good contest before 7,000. Yamazaki wins over Yoji Anjo.

23—New Japan, Yokohama: Skinheads win an eight-man tag over Choshu and company before a crowd of 17,000. Great Muta pins Hashimoto, Steiners beats Hase & Sasaki, Chono beats Steve Austin for the NWA belt.

OCTOBER:

7—All Japan, Osaka: Kikuchi & Kobashi beat Fumas & Kroffat in a sensational bout to keep Asian tag straps, plus Tsuruta & Taue keep their World PWF tag belts defeating Gordy & Williams.

8—WAR, Tokyo Korakuen: A terrible card shows Tenryu it could be nearly over and a four round singles tourney is won by Genichiro Tenryu.

8—New Japan, Yokosuka: Opening of the 1992 tag tournament without defending champ Vader forces Fujinami to take on rookie Nakanishi as his partner. Skinhead vs. Choshu feud stays white hot.

9—All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen: Tsuruta KO's Kobashi suplexing him on his head in a six-man battle causing him to be carried out proving that the returning Tsuruta is still a force to be reckoned with.

11—All Japan, Yokohama: Nearly 5,000 sellout Bunka Gym as Misawa defeats Taue, and Fuchi beats Oga in two title matches.

17—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: The FMW team of Maedomari & Tsuchiya defeat Watanabe & Yoshinga shocking the jam-packed crowd, plus Toyota & Yamada are upset by Hotta & Minami in a non-title bout.

18—New Japan, Chiba: Muta pins Norton to keep IWGP Title and The Skinheads take on Chono & Hashimoto & Iizuka before 6,700.

21: All Japan, Tokyo Budokan: 16,300 turn out to see one of the year's best singles bouts as Misawa keeps his Triple Crown defeating his usual tag partner Kawada in 30 minute four-and-a-half star main event.

21—New Japan, Hamamatsu: Finals of the tag tournament have Choshu & Hashimoto taking the top prize defeating Hase & Sasaki despite overwhelming fan support for the losers. Samurai

pins Liger to keep the IWGP Jr. Title.

22—FMW: A fax from Tiger Jeet Singh gets a lot of publicity as Singh offers to be the partner of Onita in the upcoming tag tournament, but Onita rejects the offer.

22—JWP, Tokyo: Devil Masami and Dynamite Kansai battle to a 30 minute draw.

23—WAR, Tokyo Korakuen: WAR is saved by New Japan with two extremely intense inter-promotional match-ups: Akitoshi Saito defeats Orihara and Tenryu & Kitahara over Koshinaka & Kimura in one of the most heated bouts of the year.

25—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: UWA has two shows at Korakuen, but fails to sell out either one. Great Sasuke confirms the rumors of a possible promotional death.

26—Lou Thesz, representing the UWF-I, visits the offices of New Japan to negotiate for a true Clash of the Champions.

29—FMW, Okinawa: A crowd of nearly 4,000 watches Onita work his tenth consecutive no rope barbed wire death match in two weeks and sets the stage for a split with Tarzan Goto.

29—RINGS, Nagoya: More than 8,000 fans witness the first round of the MEGA Battle Tournament. Maeda defeats Volk Han of Holland in 32 minutes.

31—FMW, Tokyo: A well-publicized challenge death match between Onita and writer Shoki Nakamaki fails to materialize as the writer fails to show up at the FMW training gym.

NOVEMBER:

1—WING, Honjoh: The promotion finds another bizarre way to punish Matsunaga as Leatherface works on his leg with a bag of nails.

2—All Japan Women, Hakata: Debbie Malenko & Sakie Hasegawa win a 30 minute non-title bout from Toyota & Yamada.

6—UWF-I officials meet at New Japan headquarters but fail to gain a unification match with IWGP champ Masa Chono. Privately, New Japan officials are outraged at the UWF-I grandstand play.

6—WING, Sapporo: The Head Hunters drop the tag straps to Mr. Pogo and Crush the Terminator.

10—RINGS, Osaka: Round 2 of the Mega Battle tournament has Maeda advancing over Dimita Petokov before 6,350.

15—New Japan, Sendai: The deciding match for the Skinheads vs. Raging Staff feud goes 21 minutes with the Skinheads winning the right to face the WAR team at the Nov.23 Sumo Hall show.

18—Oriental, Tokyo Korakuen: The dire straights of the small promotion are illustrated as Oriental, NOW, and WING all combine talent and sell only 1,300 seats in wrestling's mecca.

19—Universal, Tokyo Korakuen: A disappointing crowd of 1,500 watches the first of an eight-card tour.

20—FMW, Tokyo Korakuen: The street fight tag team tournament begins with Onita & Verichev losing when several heels gang up on Onita.

22—New Japan, Sumo Hall: Steiners drop their IWGP World straps to Norton & Halmé, Great



Atsushi Onita vs. Mr. Pogo, a continuing FMW feud in 1992 (Photo by Mike Lano)

struggling to be a niche promotion that kept jumping from one style to another. During 1992, the whole thing collapsed and Tanaka discovered that wrestling was a great deal different from selling eyeglasses.

SWS reorganized into two groups—WAR headed by Tenryu and NOW headed at first by the Takano Brothers, but now sports Ishiniriki as their lead act. NOW is so far off the charts that they are not worth analyzing. WAR's big name—Genichiro Tenryu—is flirting with making New Japan his homebase and taking Kitahara and Orihara with him. He only seems to be waiting for Tanaka to officially pull the plug. WAR will last as long as Tanaka wants a toy to play with and not a week longer.

#8: Fujiwara Family: The other group funded by Hachiro Tanaka and largely dependent on his largess is headed by Yoshiaki Fujiwara, former bone cruncher for New Japan in the 1980s. Their Tokyo Dome show was a financial and athletic failure showing beyond doubt that of the three strong style groups, they come in last. They had trouble selling out smaller arenas and even resorted to routinely lying about attendance figures. Their big shows in April backfired on them when showcasing Roberto Duran in the main event proved to be a horrid miscalculation.

Late in the year, Fujiwara was given some news which could spell his promotion's early demise. One of the bright spots on a Fujiwara card was the work of youngsters Masa Funaki and Minoru Suzuki. Funaki especially stood out with his magazine cover good looks and athletic build. A few years ago, he was the favorite of

wrestling magazines which believed he was the new idol of the wrestling world. It seems that the lessons of Maeda, Takada, and Fujiwara have not been lost on the youngsters. On Dec. 21, it was announced that they would be leaving Fujiwara Family to open their own promotion sometime in 1993. If they manage to get the financing to do it, they would be the 17th wrestling promotion working in the Tokyo area.

Fujiwara is not left with a lot of talent to keep him in business. While he still can fill a card with the younger workers, he certainly will have to look high and hard to come up with workers like Funaki and Suzuki. In just two months, Fujiwara went from a Tokyo Dome show to a possible death notice. Not a very good year.

1992 PROMOTIONAL SERIES: FMW & SWS

Tours and List of Imported Wrestlers:

FMW

1/5-1/15: Imports: Sheik, Kevin Sullivan, Titan, Gladiator, Boulder.

1/30-2/11: "Tatakai No Saito '92"—Titan, Boulder, Sabu, Starman.

3/20-3/29: "Tatakai No Saito '92"—Titan, Boulder, Looser, Spinks.

4/23-5/7: "Dotoh"—Imports: Sheik, Sabu, Boulder, Starman.

5/15-5/28: "Hateshinaki Tatakai"—Imports: Tiger Jeet Singh, Sheik, Titan, Sabu.

7/19-8/11: "Ganten eno Tabidachi"—Imports: Tiger Jeet Singh, Sheik, Titan, Sabu.

10/11-10/29: "Nangoku Senao Jah"—Imports: Gladiator, Sabu, Boulder.

11/20-12/7: "Street Fight Tag Team League"—Imports: Titan, Gladiator, Boulder, Sabu, Singh, Verichev.

SWS:

1/5-1/12: "Sho Ryu Geki Toh"—Imports: Davey Smith, Berserker, Shawn Michaels, Salvaje, Ruco.

2/9-2/14: "Sho Ryu Geki Toh II"—Imports: Haku, Smith, Marty Jannetty, Blue Panther, Charles Jr.

3/14-3/22: "Sho Ryu Geki Toh III"—Imports: Haku, Berserker, El Dandy, Undertaker.

4/16-4/18: "Battle Message '92"—Imports: Flair, Disasters, Beverly Brothers, Chavo Guerrero.

5/18-5/22: "Sen sen Fu Koku"—Imports: Berserker, Rick Martel, Guerrero.

6/16-6/19: "Sensen Fu Koku II"—Imports: Hackaw Duggan, Jose Estrada, Haku, Kamala.

7/14-7/15: "Kaku Mei Ten Ka"—Imports: Haku, Kerry Von Erich, La Fiera.

#9: WING: WING barely got off the ground in 1991 and nearly crashed in mid-1992. They were able to survive on a month-to-month basis solely by trying to out-bleed Atsushi Onita and FMW. WING even found themselves doing a Ring of Fire tournament to pick a champion in this obscure area of endeavor. They lucked out when martial arts practitioner Matasunga dove out of the Korakuen balcony in February and became something of a cult figure. Matsunaga became the fan favorite and Pogo used him again and again in all sorts of punishing angles. Matsunaga was cut with a baseball bat, attacked with a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire, had lighter fluid poured on his head and ignited, and suffered other indignities too numerous to mention.

The group's lead attraction, former FMW heel Mr. Pogo, bounced back and forth between heel and face like a rubber ball. They brought in a variety of supporting acts, the most notable was Gypsy Joe. They could only use Joe for brief periods since he did not want to exceed the limit he could earn and still draw his social security pension.

WING is in a precarious position as the year begins. They cannot afford two losing months back to back. They were in danger of folding last July but were saved by their big Aug. 2 fire match. If they are still in business twelve months from now, it will be a real surprise to many seasoned observers.

#10: JWP: The Japanese Women's Promotion is difficult to accurately evaluate. They are by far the smallest of the two full-time women's groups running miles behind All Japan Women. They are not on regular TV, they infrequently release video cassettes of their major cards, and rarely get much publicity. They have about as much status as the Cleveland Indians.

Early in 1992 the group appeared to fold. Their Jan. 12 card at Korakuen looked like it was curtains for them. There was much speculation in 1991 that the group was losing money and without a Hachiro Tanaka to back them up, that condition could not last long. But their supposed death did not prove permanent and they returned on Apr. 3 wrestling again.

Since its comeback, the crowds still languish in the 500 to 1,800 range. Its big stars are Devil Masami, Dynamite Kansai, and Cutie Suzuki. Their continued survival depends on their ability to challenge the All Japan Women for a bigger share of the market. In late 1992 there was some trading of talent between the two groups, but it is too early to tell if it will help by exposing them to a larger audience or hurt them since the All Japan Women are put over at the expense of their big stars.

Muta defeats Sting, and Ultimate Dragon wins the Jr. Title defeating el Samurai before 11,500.

23—New Japan, Sumo Hall: Another sellout crowd pays the big bucks to see Tenryu's WAR team defeat the Skinheads, and the debut of the team of Hawk & Sasaki as The Hell Raiders.

25—UWF-I, Nagoya: Takada & Yamazaki team to defeat imports Albright & Fleming, amateur star Dan Severn debuts in an impressive win over Miyato.

26—All Japan Women, Kawasaki: A four-and-a-half hour marathon card is seen by 5,500 as Bull Nakano drops her World Title to Aja Kong, plus Hokuto wins the All Pacific Title from Kyoko Inoue, Ito wins the Japanese title from Watanabe.

27—All Japan, Sapporo: Over 6,400 witness one of the tournament's best efforts as Misawa & Kawada defeat Kobashi and a surprisingly youthful Giant Baba.

27—Michinoku Pro, Morioka: An impressive turnout of 2,800 watches the native Japanese who normally work for Universal.

28—FMW, Shizuoka: Sabu & Boulder defeat Onita & Asako in another barbed wire gorefest before 4,000.

DECEMBER:

1—JWP, Tokyo Gym: Dynamite Kansai is crowned the first JWP Champion downing Cutie Suzuki in the finals, plus a semi-final is upset against Devil Misami.

3—Oriental, Funabashi: A tiny crowd of 300 watches Go & Barr win the U.S. Tag Belts defeating Ron & Don Harris in a cage match.

4—All Japan, Tokyo Budokan: Finals of the Real World Tag Tournament have Misawa & Kawada claim the top prize, plus the World Tag Title bouts as a bonus defeating Taw & Jun Akiyama. Hansen & Ave go to an outstanding 30 minute draw with Gordy & Williams.

7—FMW, Osaka: Onita & Verichev win the Street Fight tag team tournament, defeating Goto & Titan despite losing their opening four bouts. Onita then dives off a 20 foot bridge into the icy waters to celebrate his shocking victory.

11—New Japan, Nagoya: Over 10,000 watch Hiro Hase pin Masa Chono in a non-title contest, plus Dragon & Orihara win a stunner from Liger & Kanemoto in a dive-filled match.

13—All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen: Aja Kong & Kyoko Inoue win the tag tournament defeating short-term champs Norton & Halme, plus Tenryu defeats Shiro Koshinaka.

19—RINGS, Tokyo: Chris Dolman pulls the big upset getting a submission win over Akira Maeda in front of 11,600. Dick Fry wins his semi-final bout earning the right to face Dolman in January.

20—UWF-I, Tokyo Sumo Hall: Nobuhiko Takada defeats two singles opponents before a crowd of 11,500, plus Dan Severn defeats Yoji Anjo.

21—Tokyo: In what could signal real trouble for the Fujiwara promotion, young stars Funaki, Suzuki, and Fuke all announce their departure and intent to begin their own promotion in 1993.

the year in LUCHA LIBRE

by Steve Sims

Change. That was the buzzword for la lucha libre in 1992. The 59th year of professional wrestling in Mexico turned out to be, in some ways, its most momentous—and not all change was for the better.

The biggest story of 1992 in Mexican wrestling was the formation of a new national promotion out of whole cloth. Well, not exactly out of whole cloth—more like formed out of some of the finest threats from the other promotions' cloths. And you know what happens when the key threads were removed—the old promotions began to quickly unravel.

The AAA (Asistencia Asesoría, y Administración. S. A. de C. V.) was born on May 7, 1992 in Mexico City, formed by wrestlers, managers, and staff from various other promotions. Actually, the first shot had been fired on the morning of Monday, May 4, 1993, payday for the EMLL at their offices at la Arena Mexico. EMLL Vice President Antonio Pena and key babyface wrestler Konnan el Barbaro walked in, collected their paychecks, and then submitted formal letters of resignation from the promotion to President Francisco "Paco" Alonso Lutherroth. In a country where the larger promotion had been successfully operating uninterrupted since 1933—and was drawing the largest total weekly crowds in the Western Hemisphere as of May 1993, the AAA thus began its existence—within seven months AAA had become the nation's largest promotion.

BACKGROUND

To understand the magnitude of this accomplishment requires some groundwork. The origination of lucha libre in Mexico is traditionally traced to a card promoted Sept. 18, 1933 in Mexico City by Salvador Lutherroth Gonzales. Lutherroth later formally organized his promotion into a corporation called la Empresa Mexicana de la Lucha Libre (EMLL). Spurred by stars such as el Santo, Gori Guerrero, The Blue Demon, and a host of others, Lutherroth built his empire into one of the country's most successful sporting/entertainment promotions of any type. Lutherroth eventually retired and passed the business along to his sons and then his

grandsons. The business, by the 1970s, eventually passed into the hands of the nephew ("Paco" Alonzo Lutherroth) of one of his sons and also one of his grandsons ("Chavo" Lutherroth). These two were at the helm of the EMLL during the promotional war in 1992.

La Empresa was successful enough that, naturally, rival promotions would occasionally begin to attempt to join in the success. Since the EMLL tended to restrict itself to the big cities of Mexico City, Monterrey, and the Guadalajara, several regional promotions were able to flourish. The largest of these was the WWA, formed in the late '70s, which still runs cards regularly in the Baja California territory today.

Closer to home, two major challengers emerged during the EMLL's first 58 years. The first was in 1952. That year was just after the advent of television throughout Mexico. A network called Televisicentro attempted to begin a television-based promotion, headquartered not in the EMLL's backyard of Mexico City, but in most distant Guadalajara. History books attribute this promotion's failure to poor execution, although in theory it could have succeeded. It seems the promotion did not get enough stars with name-value to jump—only a couple of main eventers ever did. History would repeat itself over 40 years later, though. By then, Televisicentro had changed its name to Televisa.

The second major group to challenge the EMLL for a piece of the promotional pie developed late in 1974. Several wrestlers and promoters were essentially tired of the EMLL's headlining and pushing the EMLL's favorites when this breakaway band thought that they had the more deserving workers. On Jan. 16, 1975, promoter Francisco Flores officially formed the UWA and 13 days later it held its first card at the "el Toreo" bull ring just outside of Mexico City. (Note: By January 1975, Paco Alonzo and Chavo Lutherroth were running the EMLL). The UWA, "learning" from the earlier mistakes, immediately signed all of the big name babyfaces it could and ran regular shows at big arenas from the start. Almost immediately this promotion proved successful enough to hold its own versus the established EMLL. By 1980, by developing and promoting its own stars, such as

El Canek, Dos Caras, and Perro Aguayo, it had become the leading promotion in Mexico, a position it held off-and-on for the next decade.

The EMLL made a resurgence in the late-'80s and early-'90s to take over the top spot again from the UWA. Many factors lead to this resurgence. The UWA stuck with the same talent for too long and repeated far too many stale storylines. However, another major reason—and arguably the main reason,—is that the EMLL hired a man from outside its family to be its number two person in charge: Antonio Pena.

Pena is the man who spear-headed the formation of the AAA. When he entered the EMLL in the late-'80s, Pena became what has eventually been universally termed "the idea man" for the promotion. Pena did several things specifically to help turn around the promotion's fortunes. They will be listed later as he did essentially the same thing to establish the AAA in 1992.

Pena's new ideas were a prime reason the EMLL overtook the UWA as the nation's most successful promotion and by the spring of 1992 were the top promotion in North America.

1991

The genesis for the changes of 1992 was established in September 1991. That is, the dye was cast back then. The union of wrestlers and referees went on strike, ostensibly to protest the advent in Mexico City of the EMLL's televising of big cards each week just a couple of days after the card was held. In hindsight, and to make an extremely long story short, the events which culminated the strike were the same that led to the formation of the AAA. They were:

- Television: The union and many of its wrestlers were (and still are) deathly afraid of the impact that the televising of these events would have on the sport in the long run. In this matter, the union's concerns and fears seem to be most legitimate. Unlike the American or Japanese territory, the two main Mexico City-based territories (EMLL and UWA) ran venues around the city Daily, not monthly or quarterly. What incentive would there be to pay to see the wrestlers if you could see them for free once a week?

•Unions: I (nor anyone I know) know not the full "intrigue" under which that the established union operates. It has been openly reported that not all of the activities are on the up and up. The union is supposed to work for the benefit of wrestlers who cannot work due to injury or other legitimate reasons and to provide a post-career stipend for the wrestlers, in addition to other mundane functions. It has been widely reported that many of the wrestlers were privately very upset at what they perceived were irregularities in the union. Charges ranged from, essentially, that the leaders of the union were feathering their own nest to far worse. Well, when the strike occurred, rather than as was presented to the public that all wrestlers in the union were united, two sides emerged: the old guard, pro-union, were basically striking against Pena, Televisa, and the new guard of wrestlers who by then wanted to essentially form their own union. Looking back, it appears now that one could have predicted which wrestlers would join the AAA and which wouldn't by which side they were affiliated with during the strike.

Well, the strike was won by the old union—in the short term. The ex-officio leader of the anti-union forces, a wrestler named el Justiciero, was forced to resign from the union and thus was barred from wrestling and making a living. Television was allowed to tape the cards, but a far worse time slot was given rather than the originally granted Sunday evening prime-time slot. And all promotions were granted the right to have weekly television tapings.

But that was the short term. The long term was an entirely different story.

1992

The strike left bitter feelings on many sides and the losing side just regrouped, planning a different strategy. By the end of 1991, Antonio Pena was the main producer of the weekly television taping for the EMLL promotion on the Televisa network. He clearly became quite ingratiated with the powers-that-be at Televisa and made his contacts well. It had been rumored for much of 1992 that Pena felt privately that it was his ideas and his "characters" that had made the 1990s EMLL the success story that it had become, and further that Pena wanted more (or total) control. The Lutherroth family was not about to—nor would it likely ever—give Pena the top slot in the family-run business. Therefore, Pena privately began extending feelers for the start of his own promotion.

Oddly enough, it appears that the established EMLL did not catch on to this until mid-February of 1992, when Pena allies Octagon and Guerra Guerrera had begun to pretty much openly "recruit" wrestlers for Pena's proposed promotion. (The EMLL responded by taking away Guerra's World Welterweight Title it had given him only 15 days earlier and by soon thereafter cancelling both wrestlers' bookings.)

But, how does one start a national promotion against one large and one small entrenched promotion. I believe that a very clear analogy would be to ask someone in 1992 to try to form a national promotion in the United States. The EMLL was analogous to America's WWF and the UWA to America's WCW. How would you do it?

Pena asked himself the same question. He determined that he needed to address several areas: talent, finances, management, staff, arenas to run in, and promotion of events. The answers to these questions were the same that Pena had developed in the late-'80s for the EMLL.

Goal: To start a new successful, national wrestling promotion in Mexico.

"How do I get there?"

•"I need wrestlers." Pena obviously appealed to many wrestlers to come join him, but he concentrated on two key factors in determining whom he wanted. Primarily he wanted the best workers he could find (a better workrate was more valuable than a bigger name) and he wanted as many of the newer, less-stale characters (such as Konnan el Barbaro, Octagon, el Misterioso, and the midgets) rather than those who were heavily exposed. Plus, and this factor cannot be underrated, the AAA started its own wrestlers' union (el Sindicato Solidaridad), led in spirit if not in title by the very same el Justiciero, promising explicitly to its members a more honest and beneficial union.

•"I need management and a staff." Here, Pena surrounded himself with those whom he thought had the best wrestling creative minds. These were Konnan, Octagon, and Guerra Guerrera. He relied on these men for ideas on angles, characters, and long-term feuds. What this meant is two-fold: First, Pena chose "new wave" thinkers rather than people who had helped in the successes of the prior 59 years. Second, he chose workers rather than ex-wrestlers or office boys as the other promotions were suing.

•"I need finances." Here is where Pena's "coziness" with Televisa paid off. Somehow, Pena convinced Andres Marroquin of Televisa to help fund and establish the AAA promotion. And having Televisa's backing is saying something. It is the single-largest private corporation in Mexico, by far, and its owner (the man who founded *The National Sports Daily*) ranks as Mexico's richest man—richer by quite a bit more than Ted Turner for instance. This solved Pena's problem with "I need television coverage," too. The EMLL supposedly (it was reported in print that was the case) had an exclusive contract with Televisa to show only EMLL wrestling. Imagine the EMLL's surprise when the very first AAA show aired in Televisa—with the EMLL's top announcer, Dr. Alfonso Morales, behind the microphone—fewer than 24 hours after the first AAA card concluded. The EMLL should have known that

A REVIEW IN THE RING AAA: 1992

When this group was founded in May 1992, several wrestlers who already possessed championships jumped to the AAA. These wrestlers included National Trios Champs los Hermanos Dinamita, National Light-Heavyweight Champion Mascara Sagrada, CMLL World Heavyweight Champion Cien Caras, NWA World Welterweight Champ el Misterioso, and CMLL Midgets Champion Mascarita Sagrada. The CMLL is basically a wholly-owned subsidiary of the EMLL, so the EMLL required all the wrestlers who quit to forfeit their EMLL belts.

The titles that the promotion got to keep were the "national championships," often considered a step below the various "world" titles. Some champions retained their belts all year: Los Hermanos Dinamita (National Trios); Martha Villalobos & Pantera Surena (Ladies' National Tag); El Misterioso (NWA World Welterweight).

The National Light Heavyweight Belt changed from Mascara Sagrada to Universal 2000 to Lizmark. The National Middleweight Title was won by The Blue Panther from Octagon. Tag team belts from Volador & Misterioso to Tony Arce & Vulcano and then back. Espanto Jr. came in and upset el Hijo del Santo for the WWA (Tijuana) World Welterweight Title. And the most interesting story was how the AAA really "stole" the National Welterweight Championship.

Somehow the EMLL, while in control of the title, decided to have a title change in which long-time EMLL stalwart Ciclon Ramirez lost the title to Fantasma de la Quebrada Jr.. Suddenly, without warning, Quebrada lost the title to youngster el Rey Misterio Jr.

That, in turn, brings us to the new wrestlers who debuted in 1992. El Rey Misterio Jr. probably received the biggest push of any 17-year-old wrestler in history. Before his 18th birthday on Dec. 11, he had not only won the welterweight title, but he had won a mask match vs. Mr. Condor and hair matches vs. Tony Arce and Arce's brother Rocco Valente. Misterio, real name Oscar Gonzales from Tijuana, is being set up for a big run in 1993, and it looks like at the moment he may be getting into a mask feud vs. Psicosis—the other great debut of 1992. Psicosis, who wears a costume almost exactly like Jushin "Thunder" Liger, is a 25 year-old from Tijuana who helped train Misterio and really has the greater longterm potential of the two.

Hair matches and mask matches were not prevalent in 1992. Other than Misterio's mask win and two hair wins, the only other matches of note were Konnan's hair win over Cobarde II in Los Angeles on July 4, Jerrito Estrada's win over Piratita Morgan, and Martha Villalobos's unmasking of la Biosa in Acapulco, Sept. 18.

would happen, though. After all, at the hotel where the formation of the AAA was announced, the microphone used at the press conference was a Televisa microphone...

"I need arenas to run in." The AAA got a lot of big stars to jump. And they put them on television immediately. But, how could this be turned into money? By convincing fans to come to house shows and buy tickets. Therein lies the one major area in which the AAA had trouble in 1992. The EMLL managed in all of its core cities to "persuade" the building in which the EMLL was currently promoting to sign exclusivity contracts similar to what the WWF gets in the United States. And, like the WWF here, the EMLL in Mexico was generally running events in the better arenas. This forced the AAA to promote in a few cities, such as Acapulco and Puebla, in less than ideal arenas. But it also forced AAA to run in cities further away from the nation's capital, medium-sized cities such as Torreon and Veracruz in which neither the EMLL nor the UWA were currently running.

The AAA turned its disadvantage—not being able to run at all in or very near Mexico City—into several competing advantages. The AAA went to cities that did not often get to see those who were perceived as big stars. The crowds that attended were enthusiastic, adding to the excitement on television. The AAA's staying away from Mexico City, where most of its wrestlers had worked regularly in 1990 and 1991, kept them from getting burned out and overexposed in what still is the golden territory in Mexico. This, in turn, left the EMLL and UWA to step into exactly that same trap that the AAA had neatly avoided. By the end of 1992, the EMLL and UWA fans had seen just about everything they wanted from all of their favorite federations' stars and attendance dropped to stunningly low levels.

1993

As we end 1992 and start 1993, where do the three organizations stand?

The AAA seems healthy. Except for a core of six-to-eight regular main event wrestlers, it has the youngest and freshest roster among the three, and has slowly—very slowly—promoted several hot issues which promise sellout gates later this spring and summer. It has a fair television timeslot and will soon trade that for a better one (prime time Saturday night). It has solid backing and a proven core of creative (some might say overly creative) thinkers.

The UWA just three years ago was easily the largest group. Now it appears nearly dead on its own and seems likely to merge in practice if not in theory with the EMLL.

And what about the EMLL? Mostly it took 1992 lying down—so much so that Chavo Lutherroth returned in 1992 to a far more active role and sent Paco Alonzo "away on vacation" for a while. The EMLL has basically set as its strategy

for 1992 inter-promotional match-ups pitting wrestlers of both EMLL and UWA groups against each other. It seems that these fresh match-ups will offer its fans something to make them return to the arenas.

The Future

What will the longterm impacts of all of this upheaval of the last 18 months? As of early-'93, things are still shaking out. The EMLL has yet to get back to nearly the level of success it had a year earlier. A number of high level foreign stars (top tens in the world like Liger and The Pegasus Kid) are due in shortly and talent trading may yet help this promotion, which still has an excellent (if severely over-exposed) talent roster, make a lot of money. The UWA is still floundering and

frankly shows little sign of learning from earlier mistakes or even recognizing what they have done that has made the fans turn away. The AAA has built many feuds and programs quite solidly and seems to have a well-planned 1993 in store for fans. Their major task is to try to gain a foothold in the Mexico City market without abandoning the wildly successful "AAA Caravan on Tour" approach. EMLL's chances to rebound for the short-term are good, but all long-term signs point to a dominance by the AAA.

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A REVIEW IN THE RING UWA & EMLL: 1992

UWA: In an effort to draw some crowds back to the arenas, the UWA promotes more title matches and title changes than in any year I can recall. The UWA World Title went from Canek to Dos Caras (Feb. 2) back to Canek—for a tenth reign (July 5). The Junior Heavyweight Title ended up in the hands of youngest Shu el Guerrero, who had upset el Villano III. The Junior Light Heavyweight belt was vacant most of the year, but finally won for the third time by Japanese legend Gran Hamada in December. The Light Heavyweight Belt went from Enrique Vera to The Killer to el Villano V to el Signo to el Villano III. El Hijo del Santo dropped the lightweight belt (in a ghost change) to el Espanto Jr. who then actually dropped it to el Celestial. The Lightweight belt changed from Laser to Casandro. The Featherweight Title was won by Coralillo from Bird Boy. The trios titles went from los Villanos to The Death Missijonaries while the tag belts went from The Cowboys to the Can-Am Express to Villanos IV & V. Negro Casas held the Middleweight Title through 1992, since Jan. 29, 1991.

This group also had its share of mask and hair matches. The Black Scorpio (Charles Skaggs, aka Too Cold Scorpio) and Ninja Turtle I both lost their masks to el Scorpio Jr. The other major mask match saw los Cowboys take the masks off the Can-Am Express.

EMLL: Championship won and lost: The CMLL World Heavyweight Title was vacant most of the year; finally, in November, Miami Beach resident Norman Smiley, wrestling as Black Magic, took home the gold. Dandy won the vacant CMLL World Middleweight Title in a tournament final on July 3, lost the title back to Bestia Salvaje, then won it back on Dec. 16. Atlantis has kept the NWA World Middleweight Title without interruption since Aug. 1, 1990. The Welterweight Title went from Fuera Guerrero to America to Felino, the latter of

whom also wore the National Welterweight Title for a brief double reign. Rayo de Jalisco Jr. dethroned Egipcio for the National Heavyweight Title. Los Infernales began and ended the year as CMLL World Trios Champs, interrupted for a few months by a loss to los Intocables. But the biggest EMLL title change—indeed the biggest surprise of 1992 for the EMLL—occurred July 25 in Puebla when Apolo Dantes defeated Santanico and took home what is generally considered the most valuable singles title in Mexico, the NWA World Light Heavyweight Championship. At 24, Dantes was promoted to superstar status with this win.

Masks won and lost: Fuerza Guerrera, before his jump to the AAA, defended his mask and unmasked veteran Gallo Tapado. Blue Panther also defended his mask by unmasking Love Machine (Art Barr) in the match that drew the largest crowd and gate of the year in Mexico. But the biggest mask match, in terms of storyline, saw Pierroth Jr. unmask Supremo on Dec. 18.

Hair matches won and lost: Some fans thought the best lucha libre match of 1992 was a hair match in which Bestia Salvaje beat Huracan Sevilla on Feb. 14, but Salvaje did not stop there. He also won the hairs of Kato Kung Lee on Mar. 13 and Ringo Mendoza on Aug. 16—the first time Ringo had been shaved in 16 years. Apolo Dantes also took a valuable scalp in defeating Javier "Monarca" Cruz. Crus later took the hair of Kato Kung Lee and Dantes's brother Cesar won the hair of Kung Fu. But the biggest EMLL hair match of the year was Vampiro's winning the hair of Pirata Morgan before a turnaway crowd of over 20,000 on July 17.

Debuting wrestling: The EMLL debuted far fewer new native wrestlers than the other Mexican federations. Kato Kung Lee Jr., el Flioso, el Metalico, Platino, and el Bronco were the biggest names to come in this year.

IT'S THE END OF THE BUSINESS AS WE KNOW IT

By Mark Madden

Pro wrestling fans, what we are experiencing right now is the end of the biz as we know it... and, to quote R.E.M., I feel fine.

I know what you're thinking, especially if you're not really thinking. There has to be some way for wrestling to revive itself, just like always. But it ain't gonna happen. This business is as dead as pro soccer, as dead as punk rock, as dead as maxi-dresses. Those three deaths didn't upset me much.

Nor, frankly, does the death of pro wrestling, although I'll likely follow it 'til the corpse stops kicking. The demise of pro wrestling has been accurately chronicled in the pages of *Pro Wrestling Torch* and the *Wrestling Observer* and... well, nowhere else, come to think of it, but no one has done a death writ/obit as of yet, except maybe the comedic one Global televises every week.

So here goes. And in the spirit of David Letterman, here are the top ten (or so) reasons pro wrestling will never, ever revive itself in the good 'ol U.S. of A.

1•Vince McMahon and Ted Turner have too much money.

Let's face it, there's nothing wrong with pro wrestling that a good case of dual bankruptcy couldn't cure, but Vinnie and Ted (McMahon and Turner, not Vegas and DiBiase (if you thought that, grab a *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* and shut up)) just have too much cash—for our sakes, that is.

If McMahon and Turner didn't have a bottomless pit to fire good money after bad into, they would go bankrupt in a second. I mean, both companies stink. They don't make money. Hell, if it wasn't for merchandising, Titan Sports would probably be near bankruptcy. And when was the last time WCW made money on, well, anything? But there is no way to break these guys, especially Turner. In fact, if I understood our tax laws better, I'd probably be able to hypothesize how WCW is nothing but a tax break for the guy, and I probably wouldn't owe a

zillion dollars every April, either.

If McMahon and Turner did go bankrupt, it would clear the path for some new, daring—hell, maybe even successful form of wrestling to jump to the forefront. But as long as the WWF and WCW exist, there's room for little else. The market is just too jammed—jammed with crap, but jammed nonetheless. So, there's no room at the inn. Room in the stands, plenty. But no room at the inn.

Will Ted Turner ever run outta money? No. Will McMahon? It's a longshot, but maybe. Of course, with our luck, Turner will buy the McMahon estate and totally monopolize the nation's awful wrestling business.

And still leave room for no one else.

2•Overexposure on TV.

Oh, there's an original thought, I can hear my fans all over the nation cry, but let me finish.

Sure, the business is totally overexposed on TV. Sure, you can see a billion hours of wrestling a week even in the world's major metropolitan regions like Zanesville, Ohio. Sure, no one's going to pay to go to these arenas when everything big always happens on TV. Sure, no one's going to buy the pay-per-views when the highlights are shown free shortly thereafter.

But no promotion is going to cut back the TV. In Turner's case, it provides programming for his network and brings in ad revenue. In Vince's case, it facilitates merchandising and, likewise, brings in ad revenue. Neither promotion will cut its TV. Even if the long-term effect would be positive, it means producing a negative short-term effect. And neither promotion will cut back TV when the other could easily step in the breach.

So, even though the idea of cutting TV is a good one, it's a lousy one. Got that? So get prepared to see Barry Horowitz 5,000 more times in 1993.

By the way, the promotions could lessen the effects of too much TV by not overexposing the

few wrestlers they have who draw money—if they had any, that is. They don't, so what's the difference.

3•The sons of every big time wrestler ever all came of wrestling age in the past 20 years—and the wrong ones all needed jobs.

Self-explanatory.

4•Hulk Hogan's legacy has the business painted into a corner.

Let me explain this one.

Say the New York Yankees had one of the great baseball teams ever, like they did in the early-'60s. And say fans came to Yankee Stadium by the millions to see them. And they say the team totally and unequivocally fell apart. Stunk. Was bad in every way, shape, and form.

Well, I'd hazard to guess that the fans would stay home and the team would lose a lot of money. Actually, that's exactly what did happen to the New York Yankees. And the fans stayed away from Yankees Stadium until the Yanks rebuilt a remotely comparable club about 10 years later. But at no time did the spoiled Yankee fans give any remote indication that they would accept a subpar product.

Well, that's how it was with wrestling fans in particular and WWF fans in general right now. Wrestling was just so big during the peak of the Hogan era that everything since has seemed tame by comparison. Nothing will ever top that moment in the jam-packed SilverDome when the one match everyone wanted to see, Hogan vs. Andre, happened. Well, Hogan vs. Flair should have topped that, but that's another story. The point is, Hogan was too big for wrestling. Nothing could top him or match him in many fans' eyes, so why bother?

In the Yankees' case, all they had to do was put together a winning team. In wrestling's case, putting together another Hulk Hogan is impossible, especially since the package was largely intact when the Gagne family deposited it on the McMahon family door in 1983.

Two footnotes: One is that Hulk, through the revelation of his true self in the past year or two, has probably alienated many fans who did stick by the WWF on the premise that it was the Hulkster's stomping grounds. As for the true Hulkamaniacs, well, they ain't coming back unless Hogan does. And when he comes back, it won't be for long, anyway.

The other is that, ironically, WCW recently had Greg Gagne call Hogan in. I'm sure, a stupid misguided effort to lure him to WCW. Ironically, if Verne and Greg Gagne would have utilized their tried-and-true negotiating skills properly back in 1983, they might have kept Hogan in Minnesota and eventually made him as boring as everyone else in the AWA. It would have spared wrestling of its peak, true, but perhaps also some valleys as well.

5•Lying, cheating, stealing.

That's all anyone in wrestling seems to do. And it's catching up.

6•Lack of localized promoting.

When I was a kid, the big star in Pittsburgh was Bruno Sammartino. He drew big money. And one of the reasons he drew big money was because he was on WIIC-TV with Chilly Billy Cardille every week telling us how, doggone it, Crusher, Spiros Arion, Stan Stasiak, and Billy Graham were at different times all threats to life as we knew it in our community. Because of that, he said, he was going to do his best to kick his butt in a two-month program, or a three-month program with a steel cage conclusion if the first month drew hot.

He was our home team.



Bruno Sammartino (Photo by Gary Kamensack)

Now what I didn't know way back then was that Sammartino was doing the same schtick in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. He was their home team, too. But, with no nationalized cable, I knew no different. For all I knew, Sammartino was punching, kicking, and not much else—for us and only us. Great illusion.

It doesn't happen anymore. Nationalized cable and lack of local programming, even commercials, have eliminated that home-team feeling. And I think that was a feeling very indigenous to drawing money. Now everything's very depersonalized. There's no emotion, no one to root for. Only when someone is mega-charismatic does he transcend home-team feeling. Like Hulk Hogan.

If you think this point is minor, consider this. In 1990, the Canada Cup ice tournament made a stop in Pittsburgh for a U.S.-Canada exhibition and a U.S.-Sweden tournament game. Neither drew flies even though some of the best players in the world were on display in an event that meant as much as, or maybe even more than, the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Why? No home team.

If only Bruno would have played.

7•Cyndi Lauper just doesn't have another hit in her.

Hey, it's not like she hasn't tried.

8•The Sheik's artificial hip has slowed him down dramatically.

So what's Sid Eudy's excuse?

9•Everyone with new ideas is prevented from using them.

I give you three cases in point:

Jim Cornette: Cornette, dashing man about town—small town, that is. Cornette is putting Smoky Mountain Wrestling on the map and even hacking his way toward drawing some money using some of his fresh new theories combined, admittedly, with some hackneyed old wrestlers he's updated, freshened, and generally breathed life into.

Yet the only booking job he's ever had with a major company was as part of a booking committee where it was pretty much preordained that any ideas that didn't parallel those of the old guard would be voted down like a black rights activist running for office in rural Mississippi. Whenever the WWF or WCW is caught in a booking crunch, like both have been for the past five years, who are they going to call? Not Jim Cornette. God, anybody but Jim Cornette.

Eddie Gilbert: Gilbert, frankly, has spent a great deal of his adult life acting cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. But, as tape traders will recall, his first stint as a head booker, with Alabama-based

CWF, was boffo TV if not box office. His stint with Global wasn't as hot, but still pretty darn good considering the assemblage of nitwits he had to filter his ideas through.

Yet the only booking job he'd ever had with a major company was, gee whiz, the same one Cornette had. And no, they didn't have enough for a two-thirds majority, math fans. If they had, this column might be unnecessary, which would be fine with me because I've been at it about two hours.

Paul E. Dangerously: Dangerously is a disruptive psycho yuppie, banished scatterbrain. But, by God, he has some good ideas. To wit, look at his ICW stint where he made something Mario Savoldi had something to do with actually look good. And someone has whispered in my ear a few times that he had more than a little input into the redhot Tommy Rich & Austin Idol vs. Jerry Lawler feud that erupted in Memphis about a billion years ago. A boisterous loudmouth, yes. A guy with no respect for authority, yes. A punk who just... geez, I'd better stop here. No wonder he doesn't return my phone calls. Anyway, he's a bright guy with some good ideas.

Yet he's never had a booking job with a major company.

Most businesses make sure there's always room at the top for the cream of each generation, for the best and the brightest. It doesn't work that way in wrestling, though. It just keeps on sheltering the shallow and the stupid, as long as they've done a bad job somewhere else before.

See, if it didn't work that way, do you know what would happen? Wrestling's old-boy network would collapse. Dusty Rhodes wouldn't be able to hire Ole Anderson. Vince McMahon wouldn't be able to hire Terry Garvin. The right guys would end up having the right jobs. And then you know what would happen?

We'd have good wrestling. That's the last thing anyone wants. At least it sure looks that way when Bill Watts and Dusty Rhodes lug their useless carcasses around suites while Jim Cornette books out of a broom closet.

10•No one with old ideas is kept from repeating them.

One case in point: Ole Anderson.

The guy is like an evil Will Rogers. He's never met a company he didn't want to kill. He was head-booker with the old Georgia promotion, and with World Championship Wrestling, both times performing the booking equivalent of an axe murderer on attendance, TV ratings, and profits.

So, as soon as Bill Watts got hired to run WCW,

who did he call?

Ole Anderson.

How to justify that? Good question. And if it isn't Watts calling Ole Anderson, it's Rhodes calling Terry Allen or McMahon calling J.J. Dillon. It's not what you know, it's who you know... and how much money you've blown.

11-Have I mentioned lying, cheating, and stealing?

12-There are no fresh faces.

Again, hearkening back to the good old days, everyone stayed fresh in the days of the territories. Had I been forced to watch Ernie Ladd every week for five years when I was a kid, I would have figured out that he was a stiff who couldn't talk, whose main wrestling move was thumbing someone in the throat, who was just living off his rep as a football player.

Instead, I just had a hunch that all of that was true.

But I didn't see him every week for five years. I was lucky, er, I think, to see him once every five years. Guys stayed fresh that way, especially the guys who stunk. And with all those territories, new guys had a chance to work on new gimmicks. If a gimmick didn't work, you could move onto the next territory and use the next gimmick. There was room for trial and error. Now the only trial connected to wrestling is the Zahorian trial. Plenty of errors, though.

Instead of working on gimmicks where only a handful can see them—and hate them—entire careers are wasted using lousy gimmicks on national TV. Look at Papa Shango. Where's he going from here?

Instead of learning to work in front of comparatively smaller crowds and TV audiences, guys who stink are seen by the whole country. Even if Erik Watts metamorphosed into Lou Thesz tomorrow, he's already been witnessed as a two-left-footed clumsy papa's boy by what few wrestling fans are left in America. First impressions mean a lot, right? There's no place to work to get better. You just have to work to get over. You're either an instant star or a jobber-in-training. Sink or swim, right away. For everyone.

Instead of a guy using a gimmick in one part of the country, staying until his welcome was worn out, then moving on to get hot again somewhere else, he has to stay put—and become so stale that you could snap him like Melba toast. The Macho Man gimmick and persona is great. Does anyone even remotely care about it now? Macho's current stale state would have never happened with territories.

Instead of a young, fresh face being given time to develop, the few that surface from time to time now are pushed right to the top, ready or not. They're usually not ready and soon thereafter they're not on top, either. So don't say wrestling could be fixed by some fresh faces. There are none available. And the Japanese don't count, since no one in this country knows how to use them no matter how fresh they might be.

13-WCW has already used up the one program that could save the business: the noble black man in pursuit of the world title. The first black world champion was the best gimmick ever, but now it can never be done again, just like the gimmick of the flabby middle-aged guy who can only talk, not wrestle, chasing the world title was killed when Jerry Lawler beat Curt Hennig.

14-A bad product has forever tainted consumer opinion of wrestling.

The WWF tried a return to "real wrestling" recently and had some pretty hot matches, namely Ric Flair vs. Bret Hart on a house shows series and, on pay-per-view matches like Bret Hart vs. Davey Boy Smith or Hart vs. Shawn Michaels.

It didn't draw.

Say Ringling Brothers/Barnum & Bailey decided to go for acting fans by bringing in Robert Redford and Robert DeNiro to do a one-act play between clown acts. Would it draw? Why, hell no. People won't go to a clown show to see classic acting. They'll go to the theatre for that.

Well, people won't go to a clown act to see wrestling, either. Don't know where they'll go for that, come to think of it, but it sure ain't to WCW or to the WWF. The WWF emphasized tomfoolery so much for so long that it's now all the fans expect. Give 'em anything else and they're confused, not impressed. Truth be told, I think the WWF's best chance to draw a crowd would be to come up with a great clown act, not real wrestling. Hogan dominated the WWF for years, and he was loved, but I don't think he was viewed as a serious figure.

As for WCW, they had a chance to capture the real wrestling audience when the WWF was at the height of its gimmickry by going in the opposite direction. Instead, Ted Turner gave us Jim Herd. Jim Herd gave us the Ding Dongs and Oz, and the Ding Dongs and Oz gave us the uncontrollable urge to switch to "Hazel" reruns. Not "Any Griffith," but "Hazel." I haven't lost my mind. So, like the WWF before it, WCW tainted consumer perception of it forever when it went through its clown period.

I know audiences can be retrained. I'll listen to

your theory on that when you come up with someone that can do it.

15-Three words: Lying, cheating, stealing.

16-Guaranteed contracts.

Guaranteed contracts are killing this business. Why, I remember when I was in this business. We got \$30 a night, and that didn't even include expenses, and if we got hurt, we just worked through it no matter what. And if, by some chance, we were hurt so badly we had to go to the hospital, we were glad to bear the entire medical expense ourselves, because we had a lot of pride in what we did. If we got hurt, it was our fault. We were proud to listen mindlessly to the promoters who told us to work real stiff even though they really didn't give a damn if we lived or died, just so we made money for them and not us. Why, we were excited to just be a part of wrestling. We didn't care if the promoters bullied us with a one-sided, one-way package that they could change or even terminate on a whim. And that's how it should be... oops, gotta go, someone's coming.

Madden (to secretary): Hey, who was the big bald guy with the cowboy hat that just ran out of the office?

17-The wrestling scandals have come and gone, but nothing has changed.

Don't get me wrong. I think only about 10 percent of wrestling's fans even give a damn about what their, er, heroes do in real life. I think the rest use that old chestnut, "Hey, it's only wrestling," when confronted with evidence of Hulk Hogan's steroid use, or Pat Patterson's foolery, or all of the above if you happen to be talking about the Ultimate Warrior.

But right now wrestling could use those 10 percent. And I think those 10 percent cringe when they see so many guys still so obviously on steroids, and (provided they know who he is) when they see Pat Patterson's reinstatement. But I'm not sure Mr. and Mrs. America and their two-and-a-half children do.

To those 10 percent, the only change the wrestling scandals brought about is the fact that they no longer go. Nor will they ever go again.

18-The "sheets" killed wrestling.

That's right, that fink Dave Meltzer single-handedly killed an entire industry in just 10 years, then had the nerve to celebrate it. Thanks, Dave!

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TORCH TALK SPECIAL



Terry Funk

By Wade Keller

Wade Keller: *Let's go way back. Do you remember when you first realized pro wrestling existed? Probably when your father complained about a sore back?*

Terry Funk: I had been around it all of my life. I guess I realized it when we were travelling down a trailer on the road from Columbus, Ohio down to Texas. Living in the back of about a 30 foot trailer. It had a bathroom and everything else. It was a very wonderful life at that time. We moved from area to area and that's the way we lived. I have memories of 40—some years in this business.

Keller: *Why did your father take his family with him and use a trailer?*

Funk: That's the way that you travelled. You travelled once every three to six months. If you got a place you could stay a year, man you were happy. There were certain territories in the country then and you didn't have transportation then like you do now. Airline transportation was not as big as it is now. You would travel to an arena and hope the people and promoter liked you enough so you could stay and then make a few dollars doing what you loved doing.

Keller: *When did you first start travelling?*

Funk: We started travelling about a year after he got back from the war. I was like 4 years old, back in 1947.

Keller: *What were some of the positives of being the son of a pro wrestler when you were a child?*

Funk: The positives are going to different parts of the country and different parts of the world. The camaraderie among the wrestlers at that time was a wonderful thing. We would pull into a trailer court and you weren't a new kid on the block. You were automatically within a group, the other wrestlers' kids. It was a lot of fun. Kids from all over the country were everywhere you went. Fortunately you would see them again over the years. We didn't do that too long because he moved out to the Cal Farley's Boys Ranch in Amarillo, Tex., the most successful and the first Boys Ranch. There are like 450 to 500 kids out there right now. It was started by four wrestlers, Cal Farley and Dutch Mantell. They had some difficulty because it grew so fast. He needed somebody who could keep control of it. He had a superintendent who wasn't getting the job done at the time. There was an old wrestler Tex Riley who said, "Hey, I think this would be a great place for you to go, Dory. Cal Farley's having a problem down there and he's looking for someone like you. So we packed it up and moved

from Columbus, Ohio right on down to Texas and that's where we stayed from then on.

Keller: *How much younger are you than your brother?*

Funk: About three and a half years.

Keller: *How did you keep your hair and he didn't?*

Funk: You see, that's a very unusual thing. I got the hair and Junior's got the money. He got all the money because he believes in collecting hundred dollar bills and I believe in insane ventures that are unsuccessful most of the time.

Keller: *What are the negatives of travelling with your family all over the country?*

Funk: The negatives were you would go to a school and you would have to leave when the bookings ceased. That would often not be even at the end of a six week period. That was difficult, especially when you have a mind like mine. (laughs)

Keller: *What do you mean by that?*

Funk: Oh, nothing. I'm just knocking myself. I'm just being silly right now.

Keller: *What were you like as a kid? How would others describe you?*

Funk: I was always small for my age. I was always very, very small. I always thought I was much tougher than I was. Out at the boys' ranch, I was the youngest guy out there. In first grade, I won a medal for spelling for being the best speller in the class. They had to give a medal to someone in each class, and I was the only one in first grade. So that's why I got the medal. They came in and asked what the hell I could do and they had trouble figuring it out. I thought I was tougher than I was because the bigger kids were being nice to me because of who my father was. I would go around pushing guys around who were four or five years older. One day my father caught me doing that and said to this one kid, "Say, you can go ahead and do what you want to with Terry. I'm not going to do anything to you." So the kid beat the hell out of me. That took a lot of the edge off of me. My father was a very unusual guy and a wonderful guy. There are some wonderful things about him. When he took over the boys' ranch, they had about 180 kids out there who were running roughshod on the ranch out there, up to 18 years old. They had literally taken over the ranch. He got there and set up wrestling mats and took the toughest kids, some who were in for stealing cars and who saw their mother get beat by their father and their

mother had come back and stabbed and killed their father. So he got them up there to the gym and beat all of the tough guys and beat them in one minute. That took the edge off of those guys kind of ruling the roost. Then he got 180 kids up there and got a barber and buzzed each of their heads. There were a lot of smokers. Well, what he'd do to them is if he caught somebody smoking, he would make them eat a pack of cigarettes, drink a glass of warm milk and roll around the gym floor until they threw up. It didn't take long for them to quit smoking. He ran a crazy, wild place. He was very much of a disciplinarian. We were out there for almost four years, but when we left there, there wasn't a dry eye on the ranch, including ours, too, because it was a wonderful place to grow up and be. Every Thursday night all 180 kids would pack up and get on busses and watch my father wrestle at the Amarillo sports arena.

Keller: *Do you remember when you first saw your father wrestle?*

Funk: Oh, gosh, I was going to the matches ever since I could walk and I would sit there and bawl every time I saw my father wrestle. My brother would, too, and my mother was out there with us.

Keller: *What was your relationship with your brother as you grew up?*

Funk: I got along with my brother great. That's not to say we didn't have fights. My father would let us and my mother would run out there with a newspaper and beat us over the head until we stopped fighting. I was always on the short end of the stick. I never thought a younger brother could beat an older brother. At least I never did. And I tried... a lot.

Keller: *Who were some of your favorites to watch growing up, besides your father?*

Funk: Baron Michele Leone, Lou Thesz, Verne Gagne. Dizzy Davis is a blast from the past and a phenomenal box office attraction. Danny McShane was one of the best. Mike DiBiase, Wayne Martin and Roger Mackey were class wrestlers. I would go up to Canada in the North Bay area and see Maurice and Mad Dog Vachon. My father was the most hated man in Canada at the time and they used to have to play "God Save the Queen" to stop the riots. It was funny, because everybody would stop rioting. Everybody would stand in attention. This went on week after week and one week somebody said, "Well, screw the queen!" and the riot went on after that. The French-Canadians and loggers made this a rough area.

Keller: *When did you first gain interest in*

being a pro wrestler?

Funk: My father never forced it upon me at all. I believe it was after I was in college that I decided I wanted to go on to wrestling.

Keller: *When did you first think of that as an option? From day one?*

Funk: Not day one. Just when I was in college. Protection of the business was the most important thing I was ever brought up with. It was very strange in that area. Anytime that somebody wanted to wrestle, you could wrestle. In the Amarillo area, if you wanted to wrestle, you could come down there and wrestle. On Thursday night there for a long time, they would have three or four guys get in the ring at one time and say, "Take your pick and if you want to try wrestling them, then wrestle them." At that time there was Ray Gunkel, National Champion, my father who was an excellent, excellent wrestler. On top of that, there was Ricky Starr, wonderful Ricky Starr, who used to dance around in ballet shoes and weighed 190 pounds. And there was Bob Geigel. Those four would get in the ring and challenge anyone to wrestle them. I will never forget that because Ricky Starr was so small, but 17 guys wrestled him in one night and he beat every one of the 17 guys, one after another. He beat them all and made them submit to the crooked leg scissors. Pound for pound, he was a tough sonofabitch. A lot of people never realized that about Ricky Starr because of his ballet shoes. The cowboys thought they had one there. I used to do that, too. There was a guy in the service who came down there one Thursday afternoon and he brought his wife and his kids down. He did not think wrestling was made up of athletic and tough individuals. So he kept bugging about wanting to get in the ring with a wrestler so he could beat them, so my father put me in the ring with him and made him scream and holler. I went back to the locker room and was really dejected. I was in high school at the time and weighed about 125. This guy was about 190 and in damn good shape. But (my dad) said, "What's wrong, Terry?" I said, "I felt really bad doing that to the man in front of his family." And he said to me, and I'll never forget this, "Terry, he didn't bring his family here to be embarrassed, he brought them up here to embarrass you in front of them." That made a lot of sense at the time and that's what he brought them up there for. But that was a different era and different time and wrestling was looked at in a very different way. That's one thing I've been very successful at doing, changing with the times and not being a liver of the past. People can say what happened on this date and that date, but I can't. I can figure out a few days, but I've always been progressive and I've always

lived for the present and the future. I always think the best is to come. And I think that's the way to live and that's a promising way.

Keller: *What were some of the changes you saw in the wrestling business over the first 20 years of your life?*

Funk: First of all, Amarillo was a Junior Heavyweight area. I think that could be a successful—somewhat successful—thing in this age. At that time, junior heavyweights were 210 and under. And there were territories that were junior heavyweight and territories that were heavyweight. Al Heft would run the junior heavyweight one week and heavyweights the next. That was in the Columbus area. Junior Heavyweight were very successful in the Amarillo area. Then the heavyweights came and people wanted to see the heavyweights. That was just one of the changes. The changes in the wrestlers themselves. I did not realize the change in the body structure except I had taken part in it because I worked out extremely hard. Back then the wrestlers' physical structure was totally different than it is today. The wrestlers were interested in bulk more than anything else and they didn't realize what weights could do for you at the time. And everybody who lifted the weight was considered a musclehead. "He can't scratch the back of his head," they'd say. Or, "He can't comb his hair." That's the way they looked at them. All athletes have changed.

Keller: *You can see it in major league team sports. For instance, goaltenders in hockey used to not wear helmets. If a goalie didn't wear a helmet today, he would be dead within days.*

Funk: And now in Olympic gymnastics and swimming, being college age is too old. The other thing that you find more and more of in professional sports is longevity. It's a very important thing in wrestling is being able to maintain your health and stay in shape. But wrestling is different than anything else, because the more physical you are the more dangerous the sport becomes, but the crowd likes you more, so it's half of one and half another.

Keller: *When did you first officially step inside the wrestling ring?*

Funk: Right after my senior year in football. I trained for a month and then stepped in the ring. I was in and around the ring all of my life. There's a lot of people who helped me back then, Jack Cain, real name Jack Thorton, who was the booker for the Sheik for years. He helped me a lot. Gabe Noble helped me back then. She was one of the toughest women I ever

"I don't think my father ever told me I had a great match. Nor did he tell my brother he had a good match. And if he said nothing, I was a pleased son of a gun. And that was the way he raised us. We understood him and loved him and understood what he was doing."

saw. I had my first match with Sputnik Monroe. I'll never forget I was in the ring and my nose started bleeding. I was lying down on the mat and Sputnik would get a two count in on me and I'd lift my shoulder. He covered me again and would get another two count and the fans were about to go asleep on their seats. Finally, and this is a true story, my father ran to the ring and yelled at me, "Get up off your ass and start moving." It was like I had a rocket go off in my ass right then because I leaped up off the mat right then and started running around the ring. Everybody came up and said, "That Dory Funk really came up and helped his kid." They didn't realize I was scared to death because I would have to face him in the dressing room. That's another thing I want to get into, too. I don't think my father ever told me I had a great match. Nor did he tell my brother he had a good match. And if he said nothing, I was a pleased son of a gun. And that was the way he raised us. We understood him and loved him and understood what he was doing. He was a disciplinarian and he was kind of a hard guy when it came to that, but then he could put his hand on our shoulders and that meant more than anything. When we came out of the ring, that was the worst part of the match because we knew when we reached the dressing room he was going to chew on our butts. And that's the way he did it and that's the way he taught us. I do believe he was successful in that. Another thing is I watched a match the other day. I watch stuff from the past. I've never been too impressed because again, I'm always a present liver. Were we that good or not? I watched an hour match, and I'm not bragging on anyone or anything, but it was my brother going against Antonio Inoki and it was a one-hour match from Tokyo, Japan. I don't know exactly what year it was, but he was over there the first time with the

NWA belt and it was psychology wise and physically, until this date one of the best matches I've ever seen. I think you would agree. My brother was phenomenal. Phenomenal as a champion.

Keller: *Did Dory entering the sport have anything to do with you entering the sport?*

Funk: Not really. I was pretty much of a nut. And that shows in the way we wrestle. We have two very different personalities. I've always been crazy and he's always been his kind of way. There was always one thing that worked about our team. We were definitely two different people in that ring even though we were brothers. And we were very successful around the country. A lot of people don't remember that my father was very successful at the time when Junior was champion. Gosh, he sold out Houston, Texas many times with Wahoo McDaniel and sold out St. Louis with Dick the Bruiser. He just went on and on. He was one of the guys who lasted forever. He was always very progressive in the business. You have to remember we were running a territory that had maybe two million people in it and we had to compete with 26 other territories in the country. If somebody could pay more than you could, the talent would go. We had to develop talent and create talent and compete on a level with these territories with more people in one town than we did in one territory. We not only competed, we did a damn good job of staying on top in the country. It wasn't easy.

Keller: *You describe yourself as being crazy. What was it about you before you got into wrestling that made you crazy?*

Funk: I was just an absolute nut. I have always loved life. I don't know how to describe myself other than that. Ask anyone in the business who knows me and they could come up with a crazy story about me. I tell you craziness. Getting on an airplane when I was champion there from St. Louis, drinking too much beer, and it was supposed to be headed to Atlanta and I ended up in Memphis, Tenn. The reason I was in Memphis was I rolled off of my seat and I was on the aisle on the floor. I woke up and the guy was sweeping up the plane. I asked, "Are we in Atlanta yet?" He said, "Atlanta? Hell, we're in Memphis, Tenn. Atlanta was the last stop back." So I had to call down there and tell them I would be down there shortly. But I didn't miss my shot. I would do other insane stuff. What's crazy? It's nothing bad or anything. I'll tell you what's crazy, though. Coming out of Avallin, Tex. during summertime I would pack my bag with all my clothes in it, throw it in the trunk of my car, and take off in my underwear because I couldn't afford an air conditioner. I would drive

up the back roads. At one time I had 36 speeding tickets. Once I was driving on a back road at about 85 miles an hour in my underwear. The cop pulled me off the road. He recognized me when got I out of the car. I jumped out and said, "Damn, what a horrible damned experience this is. On top of everything else you're going to give me a ticket." He said, "What do you mean on the top of everything else?" I said, "Jesus, some guy got in the dressing room, stole all of my clothes, my bag, and now I'm getting a ticket on top of all that." He said, "Well, go ahead, Terry." And he let me go without a ticket. But I used to have one deal where I would run a race with a guy. There used to be a happy policeman. We used to get on the CB and ask "Is the happy hooker out there?" He used to say, "Where are you, you sonofabitch. If I find you, I'm gonna blow your brains out." He didn't know who I was at that time. At about 2:30 in the morning, he'd be sleeping. I'd honk the horn at him and wake him up. Here he'd come and he had an older car, so I'd outrun him every night right up the back road. I'd go into the house and already be in the house with the lights out before he went speeding by. One time Dick Murdoch and I were coming up the back road and some guy had a radio in his car and called ahead to Canyon and had seven or eight cop cars waiting for us before he pulled us off the road. It was a fun type of deal. It was almost like me and that law man talk about it. It was an enjoyable time in our lives. It was an enjoyable time in this area. That's just the way it was. At the time they were serious about catching me and giving those tickets and I was serious about avoiding them. You had to occupy yourself when you were driving everywhere.

Keller: Did you pretty much train for wrestling by wrestling and not by lifting weights or running?

Funk: Back then you didn't lift weights, even in the '60s. When I was in college, this doctor—I was always trying to gain weight—he offered us Winstrol to gain weight. We didn't know what it was or what it could do, so I took the pills once a day and I forgot to take one the next, then I'd miss them for a week, and I thought, "These ain't working." So I threw them away. Back then coaches would try to get their kids to lift weights and they wouldn't even really lift them. We would go through a weight-training program, but it wasn't understood like it is today. You would stay in shape by wrestling with six people on the card. You'd wrestle once in a warm-up match, come back later for a tag team, and then you'd have a tag team in the main event. You'd wrestle 45 minutes to an hour in the main event. If you wrestled for an hour a night or even 30 minutes, you're going to

stay in shape. A lot of guys today maintain their structure through wrestling. Guys today are putting a lot more maneuvers into a shorter period of time today than in the past. Not all of them, but a lot of them.

Keller: What did you study in college?

Funk: I finished up college lacking four hours and about ten grade points and I never went back. What would I have done if I had thought about things earlier? I would have studied a tremendous amount into the things I wanted to learn that I paid no attention to at the time because I was into being a jock. There were a lot of people at that time into that same attitude. There still are today, but I think it's less in numbers. I think the importance is put on education. I think it is an important factor. I know I emphasize it with my children very highly. One thing my father always said that holds to be true: They can take your money away from you, everything away from you—not just take away, you can lose it one way or another—but one thing they can't take away is you're mind and your ability to use it. I've always lived that way. I've hit a lot of homeruns in my life and I go to first base, and I go to second base, but then I meander out into center field and start talking to somebody. Money has never been of that much importance to me because I've always been able to make money. I've always been able to make money when I've wanted to make it.

Keller: If you had not become a pro wrestler, what would your career have been? Would you have been an actor, a doctor, an auto mechanic, or pumped gas?

Funk: I don't think I would have pumped gas, but I might have owned a gas station. What it is is that if you would drop me off out of an airplane into the middle of any town in the United States, I guarantee you I would be a success. I believe in myself. I don't care what it is. If you put me selling hamburgers, I'd sell hamburgers. I would find something I believe in, do it, and do it 100 percent. I don't know what it would have been, but it damn sure would have been successful. That's my advice to anyone, believe in yourself—and don't rule out hard work, either.

Keller: When you first got into wrestling did you have that attitude? Did you think that you were going to be a huge success?

Funk: My concern was being a huge success tomorrow night, the next night, and having the best match on the card. That was what was more important to me. Wrestling's a very trying sport.

It really is. People don't realize how difficult it is to be the best. And you can't be the best by yourself. I shouldn't say, "me." It's "we are going to be the best"—my opponent and the referee. It is important to be appreciative of those who are also involved in having the best match on the card.

Keller: Who are the people you learned the most about wrestling from early on?

Funk: Probably the biggest influence on my wrestling career besides my father was Mike DiBiase. Johnny Valentine, too. To be in the ring with DiBiase and Valentine was phenomenal. They were perfectionists. They were great, great performers. And they believed in having people walk out of that arena and loving what they did. The fans loving what they did. They were just the best. They weren't the biggest as far as maneuvers in the ring, but what they did was the best of what anyone I've been around in wrestling did. Psychologically they were the masters. Those were probably two of the best I've ever, ever been around. As far as ring psychology is concerned, I've learned from a lot of guys. Harley Race was a hell of a damn guy to go in the ring with. Eddie Graham was a hell of a guy in the ring. Graham, I might add, learned from my father, and he would have admitted that. One of the guys I used to wrestle constantly down in Florida when I first got down there was Ronnie Garvin. He was just a kid. We learned together. What a hell of a performer he was. Jose Lothario had great ring psychology. Ricky Romero. Pat O'Connor. On and on and on. Lou Thesz. I can remember when I was a kid, my father used to bring those guys out to the ranch and we had a wrestling mat and garage that was out at the barn. Guys back then who were great wrestlers, my dad would get them out there and say, "Hey, show Terry something." I can remember Lou Thesz teaching me a wrist lock. I can remember Joe Scarpella showing me stuff. I can remember Verne Gagne out there. Dick Hutton. It even goes back as far as Tony Romelli. That goes back so far it's not even funny. I remember watching him do stuff and my father working out on the mat.

Keller: Were there any who you thought you would learn from who ended up being overrated?

Funk: Who was overrated? Let me see? That sounds funny. You asked me who I learned from? Boris Malenko, loved him. Learned more from him than anybody else I learned from. What I learned from him a year into the business down in Florida, Malenko was down there and I'd see him come into the arena. He'd be

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standing way in the back and by himself in the corner. He was studying and he had actual notes. He would go on TV and talk. Believe me, he was the very best talker that I've seen in my life. He and Curtis Ieukea were the best. He would produce many, many tickets sold at the box office by the way that he talked. His talking was phenomenal. I watched that and realized then that was a lot of the profession. I don't care how good of a wrestler you are, if you're in the main event, you have to be there for a reason—back then everybody was there for a reason because everybody was competing for each other—if you could walk out and take a machine gun and were the world's greatest wrestler and you could take a machine gun and shoot it through the stands and not hit anybody, you weren't going to be there next week. So in other words, to be good, you had to be good in many ways. You had to be able to do it all.

Keller: *Were interviews ever stressed as you were growing up? Did guys talk about that at all?*

Funk: Malenko was the only one. Most would just sort of say, "Go out there and talk." They did and some were better than others. Still, to this day, people just talk. You've got 60 seconds. It's just like a commercial. Every word should be of use, not just words. And that's what's important. Every 60 seconds, just like writing a book, it should have a definite start, different high points, and an ending, also. That is of utmost necessity for a business to be successful. For an entire wrestling card to be like that. Every match or wrestling card should be like a good book. A wrestling television show should be that way. That is a format for everything in our business. Ours should be that business, for each match, interview, all of those

things should be thought out. In Japan, what is so important over there, you can tell who is over and who isn't. And they look at that, too, believe me. You better realize that and you better produce. I think that's a good way of looking at it. And if you look it, you'll find out basically everything I'm telling you is true. And you can squeeze it all down to that one point I was talking to you about.

Keller: *When did you first realize that in the ring and behind the microphone you were becoming a great wrestler?*

Funk: Seriously, I believe in myself and believe I could jump out of airplanes. But as far as being a great wrestler, I don't like to think of things that way. I don't know why. I can sure damn produce for you. I don't like to talk about being great. That's bullshit.

Keller: *Let me rephrase that. When did you realize that you would be able to make money—and deservedly so—for a long time in this business?*

Funk: This is kind of veering off. Sometime, I can't remember who it was, it was one of the boys, and he said, "Hey, congratulations on winning the championship from Jack Brisco. That was really terrific." I said to him, "Son, that's a bunch of bullshit. I didn't win a thing. When it was won was behind the doors whenever they accumulated enough votes for me to win the championship. That's when it was won." There are some highlights about my career, some things that I remember more than others. One was, and this may not sound like much to you, but we were in the heat of a war. You hear of the 100 year war, well we had about a 10 year war—All Japan vs. New Japan. It was a hot, blood-letting war, do or die, you better nail the casket down because a lot of times Inoki's group had All Japan in the casket, but for some reason, both sides would forget to nail it shut. At that time, Stan Hansen was very big in Japan. It was trying to accumulate wrestlers from one side to the other side and Vince Sr. was very involved at the time. One of the more pleasing times in the business was whenever we were in Japan and they had been robbing our talent from Spank...

Keller: *Spanky?*

Funk: Yeah, Abdullah the Butcher. Dick Slater and I used to call him Spanky. He looks just like the Little Rascal Spanky with his cut off pants and pot belly hanging off there.

Keller: *Anyway, go ahead. I'm sorry.*

Funk: They were robbing guys left and right

from us. We were in the heat of battle and going for the main artery. At that time we set up a deal with Stan Hansen—my brother and I and Baba did. Stan kept it quiet for a year. At that time, sheets would not have even gotten a hold of it. Stan made his big move. They started the stealing. So at that time, Vince called me up one day. I said, "Next time something like that happens, I'll steal the goddamn kitchen sink, too." He laughed and I laughed. That was one of the most appealing, fun times I'd had. I look back on it and he and I with my brother included, too, and it made for a fonder relationship as years went by. It's funny how adversaries become closer after a longer period of time. Believe me, I had a tremendous respect for that man. Both sides were going for the whole ballgame. It brought a tremendous amount of respect. I would love to sit down and talk with Vince Sr. again. Of course, I can't. It created a kind of feeling for one another over a period of time. We gained a lot of respect for each other from those wars and battles.

Keller: *What was the toughest part for you personally being a wrestler after the first few months, more so than other wrestlers?*

Funk: The most difficult aspect in wrestling, knock on wood and thanks that I have the wife that I do, thanks for having a wonderful wife that has just been at my side for many, many years, the toughest thing is on the family. If I talk to some guy who wants to be a wrestler, the first thing I ask him is if he's married. If he says yes, then I tell him it's not a good idea. I try to be honest with them. Whenever somebody asks me if they want to be a professional wrestler, one thing I ask is their age. It takes a long time to accomplish something politically or ability-wise, too, it takes a long time. If you're 28 or 29 years old, it's tough to start and be a success. I'm not saying it's impossible, I don't want to burst anyone's bubble, but it's much more difficult. If you're 20 and not married, it's much easier for you. If they walk through the door and still fit through the door, I tell them they're not big enough.

Keller: *What were the pluses and minuses of being on the road all the time?*

Funk: I think I travelled 300 times in one year. I was bound and determined that I was going to do it different than anyone else did. I never complained about them giving me more dates because I knew I was going to have a short run and make a lot of money at the time. And for that time, that was a lot of money. I made about \$280,000 for that year. That was, what, about '76. I don't even know what year it was. I told you I don't remember dates. But that was a lot of money at that time.

Keller: Did you take personal pride in being deemed worthy of being NWA Champion when that decision was made? Or did you see it as just part of the business?

Funk: I knew I could do a hell of a job. And I did do a hell of a job with it. I produced business every time I went into the ring everywhere I went. I would give them a good match every night, whatever they wanted, and no complaints. I'm sure if I had the thing as long as Jack and my brother, I would have gotten a little bit... It was a very hard road at that time. It was not easy. If you look at the world champions, I'm probably the only one who is still married. Ric Flair and I are the only ones still with our wives. I'm not looking at the WWF, the NWA back then. It was a grind back then. It was like the WWF at its toughest and the WWF was tough for a time. Don't let anybody kid you, it was a tough grind up there, too. Those guys did deserve the money they made because they worked their butts off for you.

Keller: Did you take tremendous pride in your NWA title reign of 14 months?

Funk: Absolutely. I took a lot of pride in the business. I took a lot of pride in the way the business was run.

Keller: Why is that?

Funk: I got into several lawsuits over it. One of them was with Pedro Martinez. I got onto an airplane with him. The Crisco Kid, Dusty Rhodes, was on the airplane with me. He said (imitating Rhodes), "Hey, Pedro is back there." Well, Pedro was with International at that time. He had put a tape in Odessa, Texas. I told him, "You get that tape out of here, I don't want that tape in here!" and a bunch of crap like that. Well, hell, he sued me over that. There are a few other things that happened there that I don't want to get into. He made a buck off of that. He taught me a good lesson, you leave people alone. You don't mess with them (laughs). It wasn't a cheap lesson, but it was a good lesson.

Keller: Were there a lot of politics and back-stabbing going on behind the scenes in the NWA both when you won the NWA title and when you lost it?

Funk: No, not at all. Not at all.

Keller: Were all of the territories at the time one happy family with only a few philosophical differences or was there back-stabbing among promoters?

Funk: The one thing of it was, the one thing that

made territories successful back then is there were no sheets. Can you believe that? There was one "sheet" back then, and that was the program from every territory. That's what would help each territory. A lot of people were able to run their territories based on what others were doing in other territories. A lot of people did do that. A lot of people utilized those programs. I think they are being utilized right now. I wonder if the two majors today ever thought of calling each other up and saying, "Hey, what's going on? Let's do something together." Back then they wouldn't do that. They had too much pride to do that and I think that's the same thing today. What they do now is rely on the sheets to see what is going on. And that's the way it was in the territories. All the other territories back then would get a hold of your tape and pick up what was the hottest thing going on and then somewhat try to duplicate it. So were there as many creators as people thought there were? And that's part of the thing I think I have—here I go braggin' on myself—but I've always thought I had a very creative mind thanks to my father. How many people can create in this day and age? It's not as many people that think they are creators. How many were just duplicating other stuff. I have talked to some people about it, how many times have I talked about what's wrong with our business today. Well, look at the damn TV shows. What good are they? It would be like if they had the same cop shows on right now. What if Hawaii 5-0 was still on? It was a great show in its day, but what if it was still made in this day over and over and over and over again? What would be wrong with it? It needs a better look. It's not necessarily the actors because they can go out and do it again. It's not necessarily cop shows because a cop show will come up again and again. So it's not the wrestling show, it's that a new look is needed. Before WWF's "Monday Night Raw" came out, I said wrestling needed a new format. I said it again and again and again. WCW is going to sit there and say, "We need a new format like Raw." Well, they're just copying. Well, hell, it took Vince another year and a half to go. I'm not taking anything away from him because I think he is a very creative man in a lot of ways. A very creative person otherwise he wouldn't be successful. I'm not trying to blow smoke up his ass either because I'm not saying that everything he's done has been good. But he has been creative. Has WCW been creative. Yes, they're putting out wrestling. They have to have a new idea, they have to have a new look. They have to have a man with a new idea and I'm the man who has it all. Well, not really. It's admittedly a lot easier said than done.

Keller: I do want to talk more about your view

"...(H)e said, 'Hey, congratulations on winning the championship from Jack Brisco. That was really terrific.' I said to him, 'Son, that's a bunch of bullshit. I didn't win a thing. When it was won was behind the doors whenever they accumulated enough votes for me to win the championship. That's when it was won.'"

on the current wrestling scene later in the interview. First, though, I want to touch on the NWA title reign again. What was your schedule as champion like back then?

Funk: Well, our schedule back then was every day. Over 300 days, then I'd buzz back here and take a day off if I had the time. You'd fly in on one day, finish up in the territory, and be off to the next. You'd go night after night, every night was the main event, and each night you had to do a good job for them.

Keller: Did you change your persona and style based on the territory and your opponent?

Funk: It would depend on where I was. It's real simple. When Kevin and David (Von Erich) would come to Amarillo and wrestle my brother and me, the people hated them with a passion. When we went down to Dallas, they hated me with a passion. I went to Houston and they liked me or they hated me, that was no problem. If Jesus Christ wrestled Jesus Christ, a wrestling fan would find something wrong with one of them. It was a very set thing. If you were wrestling somebody who they wanted as champion, they certainly didn't like you. They wanted to see that guy win with all of their hearts. If you were wrestling somebody they hated, they wanted to see you win and retain the title. More often than not, you'd be wrestling somebody they wanted to see win.

Keller: What percentage of the time was that?

Funk: Eight-five or ninety percent of the time.

Keller: What would be the reason a promoter would book you against someone the fans did

not want to see as champion?

Funk: Because he believed it was worth big box office.

Keller: *What was your favorite and least favorite territory to work in?*

Funk: Don Owen in Portland and Paul Boesch in Houston were the best. Why did I like those territories? Because you could bet your life on it that it was to the penny that they would come out there and say, "This is what the house was. It was \$14,337.22 and your 10 percent is... And here it is." Paul Boesch was the same way. As far as the champion was concerned, and my brother said the same thing, Nick Gulas used to pay to the penny. Don't ask me why, but he'd pay to the penny. He was always known as the biggest crook in the world, but he paid to the penny when it came to world champions.

Keller: *Who did you like working for?*

Funk: I just liked working. I really did. There was Chief Little Eagle. I didn't like working for him very much. He used to run Rosweld, New Mexico and Little Field, Texas. I'd never forget. We used to have a horse tank in the back end of the arena and you'd have a hose that you'd turn on in the winter and summer to take a shower and then he'd drain out the water every week. So that was a nice place to work. Where else didn't I like to wrestle? I don't know. I found good out of every place. I just loved the business. That was the great part about being champion is you got to know everybody in the business and you got to wrestle every great wrestlers in the business. Great time.

Keller: *Was there a downside to being champion?*

Funk: What could possibly be a downside? At that time, I got a divorce for about 18 months. The downside was not getting home to see my family, but at that time, I was alone at that time. The downside to the business has naturally been injuries through the years. When you're tired, you're going to get injured.

Keller: *When did you first wrestle in Japan?*

Funk: It was on Baba's first tour 20 years ago when he started. That was the first time I was there. I liked it very much.

Keller: *What was it that you liked?*

Funk: At that time it was very different. You'd wrestle in Hiroshima or Nagasaki and you would go to a bar to have a beer afterward and

they would say, "No Americans!" and chase you out. It was very, very different. Believe me, they've made steps in wrestling. We think Vince has taken steps in wrestling. If you take them from then to now, you go into an arena with no heat in the arenas and you'd freeze your butt off and whenever there was TV they'd have those old-fashioned lights and the inside of the ring would be about 100 degrees and the humidity was something terrible over there. And the people there—there were very few women going to the matches. The dress was very structured, all black ties, white shirts, black suits. They would applaud everybody. There were no boos, screams, hollers, or nothing. I was very lucky because they liked me over there. I was probably one of the first ones they really tuned into.

Keller: *Why did they take to you?*

Funk: Probably because of an honesty that there was no bullshit. I would sit there during interviews and talk to them like I'm talking to you right now. Back then the press was really important, more important than it is now. There were a lot of wrestling magazines and newspapers that were covering it as a sporting event. They would do an in-depth interview with you and talk about everything. Evidently whoever was translating did a good job of translating because evidently they liked what I said. But it was really a nice thing. I realized a lot of things over there that other guys didn't. A lot of guys would go over there and not treat the fans well. I'd sit down and talk to them whenever they wanted to talk and I'd give them autographs. I guess they liked that.

Keller: *As far as style went in the ring, did you pick up a lot or did you feel they were learning from you?*

Funk: A lot of their guys have learned through us and a lot of their young boys are still influenced by us. I always wrestled very physical over there, much more so than over here even. I think that was it. Part of what got me over there was I gave a lot of my body to them over there. I gave them more than I needed to give and sometimes what I wish I did give them, if that makes any sense.

Keller: *What was best and worst about wrestling in Japan?*

Funk: The best part about wrestling in Japan was they considered wrestling a pure sport at that time. That was the best part. Your recognition as a hell of an athlete to this date. As far as your entire media and people are concerned, they look at the wrestlers with a lot

of respect and as a hell of an athlete. The worst part, the down side? Trying to truly understand the structure of their business. And I think that still these guys are in disarray at times figuring out what the hell they're doing and where the hell they're going. What am I doing? You really don't know. Do you ever feel secure in Japan as far as you, yourself, are concerned? You could be the most secure person in the world, but they just don't talk that much, so it leaves that insecurity. That would be the toughest part.

Keller: *How does Shohei Baba compare to Don Owen and Paul Boesch?*

Funk: Same thing. A very good man to work for. In Japan, their structure is very different than over here. In Japan, you try to get the best deal you can. And when you strike a deal, their word's their bond. And that's the way it's always been.

Keller: *How were you treated differently as the NWA Champion when you went to Japan?*

Funk: I was treated better afterwards. I think I became a much bigger star afterward than during.

Keller: *What was it that got you that star status in Japan? Duration of time wrestling there?*

Funk: No. You can narrow it somewhat to duration. My popularity grew as I wrestled there. I wrestled Abdullah over there and the people just began to really like me and follow me. When they did that, it just went out of total proportion. Don't ask me why. I wish I could say the feud with Abdullah was influential. The feud with the Sheik was influential. I wrestled Billy Robinson, Tsuruta, and Baba and produced good matches and worked hard to produce them.

Keller: *As NWA Champion, did you wrestle everyone in Japan that was good?*

Funk: I wrestled every star that they had on that side at the time.

Keller: *Did you feel pressure at that time to represent the United States well or did you just go about your business with enough clout not to have to prove anything?*

Funk: Proving, to me, was producing the best matches I could with the opponents I was with in the ring. It's enjoying proving that they made the right choice with whatever opponent they put me in the ring with. Again, you have to remember now. We're talking as if I was over there a lot as champion. I wasn't. I was only

over there for about two weeks because they had to divvy up the time for the champion. Then when you get over there you don't wrestle in a championship match every night. I wrestled probably four at the most championship matches in Japan with the title. It was not as much as you think it is with the belt over there. I will never forget as the champion, the night before I was supposed to go in the ring, they have the baths over there. They have the hot and cold water. I just finished wrestling and I kind of just sunk my head under water and shoved off of one side and pushed into the hot water and it blistered and burnt my back entirely down, about three inches wide and all the way down my back. And it filled up with water. I had to wrestle the next night with that on there.

Keller: What made you decide to retire in 1983?

Funk: I've probably never said this before. The period right before that—but Tiger Mask started and was very, very, very hot and New Japan was very hot again. At that time I decided to retire because I thought New Japan was a treat. My brother did, too. We thought they were threatening oblivion of All Japan because they were doing so much better. They had us in a casket. We had to come up with something at the time, so I said I would retire in three years. I meant everything about it, too. When I said retiring, I meant retiring in Japan. It wasn't a total retirement. Baba later asked me to come back for one deal. I probably haven't been back more than 15 weeks, not even that long. Very few periods over 10 years. Financially sometimes you can't afford to not do some things. I wasn't trying to flim-flam anybody. Sometimes we talk about young kids getting into this business taking something today to help their career and enhance them now, but 15 years from now it would take a negative effect on them. I was very set on retirement when I said that, but sometimes you forget how long you are going to live and how long you are going to want to be involved in something—and sincerely mean it—but you can't do it. You know you said something, but, gosh, you'd love to be there. I came back a couple of times when I had the opportunity. I shouldn't have, but I loved it over there.

Keller: How did you get involved in acting?

Funk: Very simply. It was a long time ago Sylvester Stallone was looking for a big goof to help him in a movie, so he was responsible for getting me into the business. But around 1985, a fellow by the name of Tom Green, producer of "Wild Side" and a lot of other things, got me involved in "Wild Side" which put the hook back in my mouth. I enjoyed it. It's very

enjoyable while you're working. It's a very frustrating business.

Keller: Why is it frustrating?

Funk: One thing, being very honest with you, is the number of people out there and the number of people capable of doing it and doing it well.

Keller: So the competition is frustrating?

Funk: To a point beyond competition. If they can picture a person in their mind, they will find that person and that person will be able to act and act well. The figures were this a couple of years ago, and I'm sure it's more now, but it was like 85,000 actors with only 5,000 making over \$5,000 a year or \$20,000, whatever it was. There are another 100,000 wanting the card. The odds are terrible. I've enjoyed it. I can make myself a good living out there. Nothing spectacular, but a very good living. What a lot of people would consider spectacular. I'm not trying to sound aloof, but I make pretty good money out there.

Keller: Was Hollywood different than what you thought going in, especially the way movies are made?

Funk: Not really. I've been around television my entire life. I'm aware of what you have to do on television. I've made a study of it. One thing that will throw you, let me give you an example. It's like playing the piano. I learned at Me-SELF school, I learned it all "me self" (laughs).

Keller: I've heard really good things about that school.

Funk: Yes, a lot of people have gone to it. Some have been successful and some haven't.

Keller: The tuition is certainly competitive.

Funk: Yes it is. But you take a kid and start teaching him piano at age 5. He can play a concerto if he's 35. It's damn near natural ability. It's the same way with acting. Not so much the acting, but the dialogue and stuff, comes very easy to those people. It's coming easier to me now than it ever has before. But for a while, you're doing verbatim. It's something that you've never done before and it's something you can't just sit down and do. And that's not the only thing that takes training. A lot of things take training down there. It's a me-self method. You get down there on the set and learn your marks, you learn what is camera right and camera left. It was on-job training is what I did.

Keller: Do you think the acting you did for Paradise Alley and Wild Side and other jobs

helped you in wrestling?

Funk: No. Two totally different businesses. That is where people make the mistake, ever comparing the two. Comparing wrestling to that is like comparing badminton to football. There is very little similar.

Keller: Why do you think people compare the two?

Funk: Well, they think they are similar because you're talking on television. They think if you've been on television, then you can do that. They are two totally different things. The inner-structure is different. It is a very, very closed situation out there. Promoters are tough, but I think those guys are even tougher.

Keller: Do you think being on television in wrestling helped your on-camera presence?

Funk: Let's say it doesn't bother me. What bothers me is sitting down there on a cold-reading in front of a woman who says let's see what you can do. That's tough, my friend. As far as having your lines and ample time to study them, that's not tough. The cold-reads are the hardest pressure in the world.

Keller: Did you feel comparable pressure before wrestling matches?

Funk: Let me think about that. I used to hear Gene Kiniski say, "The day that you stop taking a nervous piss, you're not that good of an athlete, you're not concerned about your job. There's another guy who was a hell of a competitor in his time. He would work his ass off. What he didn't make up for in ability in the ring he sure made up with hard work.

Keller: Did you feel the nervousness Gene Kiniski said you should feel?

Funk: There have been certain situations when I have been nervous before a match. Take the match in '83 with Hansen & Gordy, I was nervous at that, because it was going to be my last match in Japan. Going in the ring the first time with Lou Thesz. The first time with Pat O'Connor. That was nervousness. Mike DiBiase. I'm not nervous about getting in the ring with anybody right now. I don't get that nervousness. I'm very confident. But sure there are times I have been nervous.

Keller: Why did you go to the World Wrestling Federation?

Funk: Because again it's a part of picking up on the times. In the first place, there were 26 territories in the country. One that wasn't there

when all of this happened was us. Why wasn't it, because we were able to see in the future. Whenever I saw what was happening as far as satellite is concerned, and my brother and I saw what was happening, we decided the business was going to change. We better be out of the territory business when it changed. You could sit there and say to people that and they couldn't foresee it. I foresaw stuff a long time ago. I sat down in a room with Stan Hansen, Bruiser Brody, and Jim Crockett. I sat down there when my brother was doing the booking there and I proceeded to tell them what the business was going to be and they looked at me like I was an idiot. I told them there were going to be million dollar houses. I was telling them in Japan what they were going to do over there long before it ever happened. I can tell you pretty much what the foreseeable future is over here.

Keller: *When you went to the WWF, were there any mixed feelings as far as what Vince McMahon was doing, with the image that we are here to entertain more than fight?*

Funk: I don't think that the "we're not here to fight, we're here to entertain" attitude was there at the time. I mean, that was not. You must remember the old pendulum theory. The fans swing and it's what they want. It's what you produce. That's what they wanted at that time in this country. I went up there because I realized there was a gold mine up there. And there was. And I went up there, not with the mind of just grabbing, but trying to help. Also, it's not, "What can your promotion do for me," it's "What can I do for your promotion." I always went into an area with that thought of helping the promotion. And I believe I did help them at that time, helped them a hell of a lot.

Keller: *Did you like to personally deal with Vince McMahon Jr.?*

Funk: I never had a problem. I got along with the guy fantastic. I never had one dollar argument with him whatsoever. Believe me, I'm not promoting for a job, I'm just telling the truth. He paid properly. I was a professional doing what I thought was right professionally. He lived up to what he said he would live up to.

Keller: *A lot of people who have followed wrestling for years talk about how the national expansion of wrestling damaged the business and that expansion was unnecessary. The way you talk, apparently you believe it was inevitable and not necessarily bad. Is that true?*

Funk: If it wasn't Vince, it would have been Verne. If it wasn't Verne, it would have been someone else. The reason they weren't there is

they weren't smart enough to move fast enough. I think I would have been smart enough to move fast enough if I had the financial ability and been in a location. Location, environment is very important in this business. I don't care what you say, if Vince had been in Phoenix, Arizona with the same promotion, he would not have wound up where he was. Where the first satellites went up was in the popular centers. You can say everything you want to, but there are two media centers in the United States, Los Angeles and New York. Those were very important factors, that they were accepted by the media. They're going to have the first opportunity because they are there. I don't care if it's the first with the new camera or the first with new subject matter, it usually comes out of those centers.

Keller: *Do you agree with many who say McMahon looked out for himself and not the business as he expanded?*

Funk: Can you disagree with Walmart at all? Let me tell you something. I'll never forget this guy who owned a store down the street, he's 75, Mr. Quigly or something like that. He was down there at the five and dime store and every time you came in there, he'd know you by name. He is no longer here. He was a wonderful man. But times change. Whenever McMahon went through the country, you can't say he was wrong because you can't say Walmart is wrong. And it is a free country. If you are able to do that, you're able to do it. Where the mistakes were made was within the 26 promoters. Vince gave the fans everything they wanted under one roof, just like Walmart. The reason I knew that was going to happen, I saw it happen with Atlanta. Atlanta was coming through here with their tape. While it was sitting up here, you had to look at it for the future. We had great wrestling and were doing great business, but we could take a star off of Atlanta wrestling and bump up our house way up because he hadn't been here, not because he was a better wrestler. That's all he produced. He produced something that wasn't on the weekly deal.

Keller: *What surprised you most during your stay in the WWF?*

Funk: It was big time business. That was what impressed me. They had lighting. They had cameras. They had everything of a big time business. Years ago they used to have the arena shows (on television), but it was on a weekly basis and you'd eventually kill yourself because you were giving away your main events right off of the doggone show each week. It was hot for a while, but then it turned cold. So he came up with a new formula.

Keller: *What disappointed you most during your stay with the WWF?*

Funk: The worst thing I couldn't understand—it was a chance that was necessary—was to go out and wrestle the same guy every night. You had to look at it like they hadn't seen the match in that town. That was a shocking change for me in the business. That was the big thing where I went, "Gosh, what is this?"

Keller: *Did you like being able to wrestle the same match each night and "master" the match? Or did you really want to do different matches each night?*

Funk: It has been a very successful formula, but very restrictive as a talent developer.

Keller: *Because over a two week span you would wrestle one guy, instead of 12 or 14 different guys, right?*

Funk: Exactly. That's the biggest thing.

Keller: *What was your impression of the Hulk Hogan phenomena?*

Funk: The Hulk Hogan phenomena when I was there was utterly... I'd never seen anything like it. It truly was a phenomena. Some people used to say, "What about Hogan, what about Vince?" I would say, "Hogan is Vince and Vince is Hogan." And they were. It was a gamble. It took cuds to go over and do that. They were in the right place at the right time. Vince had picked a person that was, out of all of the people at that time, I'm not saying now, but at the time, Hogan was the man to pick and he had the vision to realize he was the man. For certain. We will never see a wrestler on the cover of *Time* magazine unless the sonofabitch murders the president. But that would get you up there. I think we have a couple out there who are capable of doing that (laughs).

Keller: *What was your impression of Hulk Hogan personally?*

Funk: Being very honest with ya', I've had my differences with Hogan. I think he handled things very well. I think it is a very difficult thing. I've been out there in California. I've seen some wrestlers, too. I've been very successful at times and probably the most successful of anyone (in this era in) Japan. I don't think it affected me too much. At the time I was around him, (his star status) hadn't affected him at all. If they ran amuck, it was much, much later. I don't think it affected Vince too much, either. They were much too busy to be affected by it. They were tough and had tunnel vision at that time; they knew where they

were going. Vince knew where he was going. Hulk knew where he was going. And they were going to damn well make it and they did. Where did it run amuck? Did it run amuck?

Keller: *Who's asking the questions here?*

Funk: I'm just talking to myself (laughs). Where it ran amuck was when it became a necessity to become entertainment. That's where it ran amuck. It became a necessity because there were a lot of people from the state organizations (athletic commissions) around the country who were doing a lot for nothing. With pay-per-view coming to being, they had to do something. Or else, if you take 10 percent off the top and a lot of damned areas, that's a lot of your profit. They weighed it out and I'm not so sure they didn't make the wrong decision at the time. In fact, I think they did. But as we sit here, they're still making money and doing business, maybe not as much, but they make bushels of baskets of it. It's just a matter of the times.

Keller: *Did you make any friends in the WWF?*

Funk: They were all my old friends anyhow. They were all people that I had already run across while travelling around the country. Another thing, the WWF has produced another type of individual. They have established so many people and you only have so much time to establish them. Whenever you have to do that, you do the easiest way possible because it's easiest for your business. It maybe isn't necessary, but it's the quickest way to the bank and I'm not so sure I wouldn't have taken the quickest way to the bank. I realize I'm not going to be the richest person in the world.

Keller: *And you said money has never been your driving force?*

Funk: That's true, but I can see why they did what they did. I'm not trying to contradict myself, but I can see why they did what they did.

Keller: *Are you happy with how the WWF utilized your talents?*

Funk: I don't think there was any problem with me. I don't think I was ever anything but working on top the whole time I was there. That's another home run I hit where I ran off to left field. I'd do it again the same damn way. You've got to know when to fold them. Timing is very important. I'm not going to let grass grow under my feet. I'm not going to be there to be a furniture piece. I'm going to be gone before I'm furniture. I'm not so sure it's a wise way for everybody to do anything, but it has been successful for me.

Keller: *Did you enjoy your stay in the WWF?*

Funk: There are some things that I didn't enjoy. I thought some things could be done somewhat differently. Let me put that a different way. Any business you go into you are going to have some people—and I found this with WCW, also—who are there only to keep their job. They are willing to keep their job at any price. I think you run into that anywhere. The promoters, people working for them, everyone else.

Keller: *What extremes did you see people going to to keep their jobs?*

Funk: Typical kiss-ass stuff. That's a good enough way to put it.

Keller: *What went into the decision to leave the WWF when you did?*

Funk: I was up there going and going and going. I had been on the road a hell of a lot. At that time, Vince was looking for opponents for Hogan for NBC and nobody really wanted to go on TV at that time, not because of him (but because they would lose on national TV). It didn't matter to me, so I went ahead and made my TV shot with him. I had been with JYD for a while and did not see anything in that situation. I knew I was going to have to break away from that. Well, hell, I heard the coyotes hollering back on the Double Cross Ranch.

Keller: *Did you mind wrestling people like Junkyard Dog where you could not show off your in-ring talents as much as against most agile and talented opponents?*

Funk: I think we had good matches. That's my responsibility to have a good match with Junkyard Dog or anybody. At that time he was the closest thing they had to Hogan. When you take that check to the bank each week, there is extra money.

Keller: *Did you take extra pride in having good matches with wrestlers like JYD?*

Funk: Hey, believe me, he was over for a reason. Somebody liked him for a reason. People were screaming and hollering for him, wanting to see him for a reason. Not particularly talking about him, but I would love to think I could have a good match with a broom stick. If I go out to the ring and have a match with a broomstick and go back and the guys say it was great, then I accomplished something.

Keller: *Two guys who weren't broomsticks were Rick Steamboat and Ric Flair. Who did you like to wrestle more?*

"Flair doesn't take the biggest backdrop. There is not one particular move that you can say Flair does better than anybody else. So what is it? It is him going out with total conviction that he is going to have the best match on that card on that night anytime he steps into that ring."

Funk: Now you're trying to get my head chopped off, trying to get me enemies. No, this is truthful. The Flair situation was a hell of a situation because the issue was there. Again, I'm not hedging, but it was fun because the issue was there and there was hard work on his part and my part. We went into some areas where the publicity wasn't right in some towns and we still did some business. They had some problems with promos and advertising for house shows at that time. We worked hard, but I really enjoyed satisfaction from the matches that we had. It is always great working with Steamboat because Steamboat is the epitome of a nice wrestler. Not the epitome, but he's—well, Ric Flair would tell you the same thing. He loved working with Steamboat. The guy is what you're looking for when you walk in the ring with a guy.

Keller: *What is it that makes Ric Flair such a great wrestler?*

Funk: Why is Flair like that? Because Flair has that attitude that he wants to be the best every night of every match and it doesn't matter what it is and it's that type of attitude. That's Flair's attitude. That's what makes Flair great. Flair doesn't take the biggest backdrop. There is not one particular move that you can say Flair does better than anybody else. So what is it? It is him going out with total conviction that he is going to have the best match on that card on that night anytime he steps into that ring. He believes he can. Steamboat has a lot of that in him, too. Flair would tell you the same thing, Steamboat will sacrifice himself for a match. That's something about Steamboat that you don't find in many people. Steamboat will sacrifice himself. That's funny, but Flair won't be so apt to sacrifice himself, but his total conviction will be that he will have the best match on the card. That gives you two different personalities. Two totally

different attitudes, but they're two totally successful performers.

Keller: *What did you enjoy most about working for WCW?*

Funk: There were a lot of things I enjoyed. The enjoyable thing was coming back at that time. It was a total conviction with me that I wanted to do some things and to accomplish some things as far as going out there and just busting my ass. It was enjoyable being successful. I love interviews. I was very, very pleased with a lot of things I did on television. I was very, very pleased with the Grill. Believe me, it was not that easy. Preparation is not that easy, it is necessary to do better than average Grills and a lot of times those Grills, I wouldn't know who I was going to be on television with. To do those things and have them work out and when you do a good one, it is very enjoyable. Another thing that was very enjoyable to me was working with Chris Cruise. I loved kind of molding Chris because Chris was an absolute idiot that needed molding. I enjoyed molding him and I enjoyed screaming at him. I meant every word of it when I told Chris, "Stop that crap! That's wrong." And I'd have no mercy on him. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed commentary with Chris because it wasn't the same as what you usually get. When you commentate, you have the color guy and commentator. This isn't football. That's not what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be two guys loving watching something. To sit there and enjoy it with the people, that's what's good. That's when you have a good combination. He wasn't the commentator and I wasn't the color man. We were just a team that jelled and worked together well. Vince and Jesse (Ventura) worked well together. They had just a little bit between them. That wasn't there with Perfect and McMahon or you'd still be hearing them. Don't misunderstand me, Perfect is a hell of a piece of talent. I'm not saying anything at all. You find those little combinations that work, that jell. For some reason it jelled with us. We don't know why. I'm not saying Chris is the only guy I can work with, but I'm just saying that I enjoyed that combination.

Keller: *It has been said that you were upset with the Ric Flair "I-Quit" match because you were not told that it was a retirement match. Is that true?*

Funk: It did anger me. I wrestled the man in an "I-Quit" match and nobody informed me it was an "I quit the wrestling business match." That was a neat little trick.

Keller: *Did you express your anger? Do you think it was intentionally kept from you?*

Funk: I think it was intentional. I think it was shitty. I don't know to this day who did it, but I thought it was a shitty maneuver. They could have told me ahead of time and it probably would not have mattered to me. Just let me know what the hell I'm doing. If you want something from me, you ask it from me.

Keller: *Did Ric Flair know about the situation?*

Funk: I never asked him. To this day I don't know.

Keller: *Do you want to know or is it part of the past?*

Funk: Oh, it's part of the past. I'm sure if I wanted to know I would get the truth. I did not understand a lot of things.

Keller: *For instance?*

Funk: For instance? All right. I cannot understand why I did not know what the card was and I was supposed to be executive producer (of World Wide Wrestling) and I could not get the sonofabitch from the booking committee ahead of time. So I'd go in there. If it was that ill-run, they should not have been in there in the first place. To walk on there to a damn show and not know what the damn card is. To withhold from me what was on the Grill and to change it without notice. Why would somebody possibly want to do that shit to me. I just wanted to see them do business, even up to that point. That's all in the past, my friend. I said before, I don't live in the past.

Keller: *What have you been doing since you left WCW which is the last time you were a national figure? What about Hollywood?*

Funk: I did an entire series for seven months out there which drove me crazy—not the series, but L.A. did. I'm good in L.A. for a couple of months, but if you keep me out there for seven months time and I've got to get back to Texas. I've done Quantum Leap. I've got some other projects coming up, Brisco County for one. I've possibly got a movie coming up this summer. Anything can happen. That's this business. About eight weeks ago I got back after doing that series last fall. I raised a bunch of cattle last year. I went over to Austria and wrestled in Austria. I've been over to Japan. That's about it. I've enjoyed myself very much. I have an advertising deal with Chevy dealerships all over half of Texas, part of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado. It's a nice deal, a very lucrative deal. I've been staying in shape and doing independents, wrestling people such as Eddie Gilbert, who is a very talented individual.

Keller: *Are you interested in wrestling fulltime?*

Funk: Am I interested in full-time wrestling? I would be interested in the business fulltime. I'm always interested in the business. I would like to say that I wasn't, but I love it.

Keller: *Physically, what shape are you in?*

Funk: Very good. I've had a lot of problems. I've had problems with my back. The last time I had a problem I was in Japan. It was a very severe injury. No, it was WCW, the busted sacrum. It was a very painful thing. I think that's possibly something they had in mind when they did that retirement thing. They were looking business-wise or whatever they were thinking. I have no idea what went on.

Keller: *Talk about some of the injuries you've had over the years? Has growing older made you more susceptible?*

Funk: It's not growing older, it's the matter of years in the ring that leads to getting injured. I've had so many stitches it's unbelievable. I've had probably in excess of 100 stitches. I've had my elbow operated on. I've busted my neck before.

Keller: *Did you ever have an injury when you were scared for your career?*

Funk: I had an injury somewhat like the Orndorff injury. I was making money up there. I went up to New York to make money because I wanted to make money at that time. I was wrestling Lanny Poffo on TV. I had him on my shoulders and I was going to drop him across the top rope. I happened to be too far from the rope and came down with his entire weight on the back of my head and neck. It screwed up my vertebra between five and six. I kept on wrestling. I lost my bicep and lost my pec. It took me a good year—and-a-half to get that back. That was the one that really, really scared me. I was in need of money at that time and I continued on. That was one of the main reasons I got out of there because I had lost my tricep and I didn't even make a big deal out of it. It was going fast. It was very, very painful. And I've had surgery on my knees. I've had two on one, four on another, I think. I've just worked hard and over a long series of years it's taken its toll on me. Look at Dynamite. He is the hardest wrestling guy I've seen. And he did for the people. And he did it for his peers. I don't think he did it for the money.

Keller: *Do you ever regret at all, even for just a second, getting into the wrestling business?*

Funk: Not at all. Not at all. If I had it all to do over again, I would do it all over again. There has been a lot of sadness at times. Believe me, a lot of sadness. I do not regret it and would do it again and live each day as I did before. I would not change many things.

Keller: *What is your brother doing now?*

Funk: He's living in Florida now and still going to Japan on occasion. He's still staying in shape. I used to ask him, "Junior, what are you going to do when you get out of the business?" And he'd say, "I'm going to always be in the business. When I get too old to wrestle, I'll referee. When I'm too old to referee, I'll write for a wrestling magazine." He was being funny, but also serious.

Keller: *Why does Dory seem to not be involved in the business as much as you in the past few years?*

Funk: I think it had to do with the character. Not like a character you're portraying, but who you are. He is a much quieter individual. He's not as outwardly as I am, I guess.

Keller: *Do you think he wants to get involved in the promoting, administrative end of the wrestling business?*

Funk: I'm sure that he possibly would if the right possibility came up. We're talking about wrestling in a different era. Where are the opportunities? There aren't that many out there.

Keller: *Are you still close to your brother?*

Funk: Very close to him. I seldom don't talk to him several times a week.

Keller: *How long have you been married?*

Funk: I've been married, let's see now, oh my gosh, 27 years now. Something like that. We got divorced for about a year and a half, so I have to add and subtract. My father passed away about a year prior to the divorce, maybe two years. It's very funny, I wanted to be successful for him. I became obsessed with this. This was before I won the NWA Title. It was very, very necessary for me to be a success. Not me, but this territory to be successful. It was of utmost importance. It helped my grief subside after my father passed away. He was my best friend, my business manager, my pal, my buddy, my advisor. He was everything to me. He was my idol. I loved him. Everything he did was terrific, good or bad.

Keller: *Was Dory Jr. a good friend to have while going through that?*

Funk: Oh, absolutely. He grieved the same way. We both couldn't believe it. It was health one day, you know, and just bang. He died of a heart attack. We were out at the house, having a party with some of the guys. Les Thorton and him were out on the floor out there. It was just one of those deals. Les said nobody could hold him in a facelock. Les said he couldn't get out of the facelock. Senior sat up beside me and said, "Wasn't bad for an old man." I said, "It sure wasn't." But we used to do that kind of thing all the time. Later on he walked out to the front yard. My wife was out there. This was at his ranch. He walked out there said, "Vicki, I'm having a heart attack. Don't tell anyone, though." He was macho that way. Don't ask me why, but don't be that way, the way a lot of men are. He had a heart attack. We jumped in the car and drove him to Canyon and took him to a little hospital. Don't ever take anyone with a heart attack to a little hospital. They put an old-time EKG on him and said, "We're going to roll with the punches and take you to the big hospital." In about two hours, we jumped in the ambulance. My brother jumped in the front and I jumped in the back where Dad was—and it wasn't by designation—and about three miles from it he asked, "How much further do we got to go?" I said, "About three miles." Just as I'm talking to you now, he said, "Dammit, I can't make it. I'm going." I truly believe he was going somewhere. But, anyway, that's how he passed away. It was a tragic damn thing to me.

Keller: *Did this change you as a person?*

Funk: Probably. Again, I was obsessed with my profession at that time. My wife said she was tired of living alone married to a guy who was obsessed with wrestling. That's the way it went. Then I was obsessed with grief from a divorce for about six months. I finally got life back on the road again.

Keller: *Tell me about your kids.*

Funk: My daughters are both really sharp. They're great, great kids. They've got a lot of sense. They're 20 and 24, both still living at home. The one who's 24, I give her the luggage every Christmas and she don't take the hint. That's the way it's going. The younger one is getting married. She came up with the big announcement to me and I guess she thought I was going to scream and holler or something, but she's marrying a good boy, so that's what counts. And he's not going to become a wrestler. Over my dead body.

Keller: *In a recent article in the Torch you said you wanted to take over an hour of wrestling on TBS.*

"How much further do we got to go?" I said, 'About three miles.' Just as I'm talking to you now, he said, 'Dammit, I can't make it. I'm going.' I truly believe he was going somewhere. But, anyway, that's how he passed away. It was a tragic damn thing to me."

Funk: That was before WWF "Monday Night Raw" came out. That's not my concept, but it's somewhat of a change and a facelift.

Keller: *What are some of changes in the business in the last ten years that you wish you could take back?*

Funk: I'm not so sure that things haven't happened because it's the best way for them to happen. If things didn't happen the way they did, there possibly would be no place in this profession for me or a lot of other people. I see a lot of promising things for the wrestling business.

Keller: *A lot of people see wrestling nearing doomsday, ready to be extinct like roller derby, because nobody is around who seems to be able to run promotions?*

Funk: That stuff is so easy to go ahead and change. The first thing I would do, if I was going to really produce a successful format, the hour in the morning I would definitely keep. I would move the other one at night. I would prefer to have two hours on Saturday. Three overall on TBS over the weekend. A mid-day show on Sunday like they have now. I would make the Saturday morning show a competitive type show for kids. On the major show, I would move it to Saturday night, 11 p.m. Eastern. I would go with "H-C Wrestling."

Keller: *What is that?*

Funk: Hardcore wrestling. That's what it would be. I would make it Saturday nights. Not necessarily blood and guts, but I would give them a damn facelift that they would love and the people would love. On Saturday night, you would want to watch it because it was hardcore. You could do a lot more because you're past (prime) time. I would have a different look. I would totally facelift them.

"I am interested in doing something in the business as long as it's interesting to me. There are a lot of things that interest me in this business. I think I've got sense, and I think that I've got knowledge in this business. I've been successful without a bad mark everywhere. I've been a success in every end of the business."

Keller: What do wrestling fans want today that they are not getting?

Funk: The cop shows aren't dead. Wrestling shows aren't dead. They need basically what I'm talking about. You're seeing the same M.O. with Vince McMahon and any other group, the same intro music, the same whole damn deal. It has become not an asset, but a detriment to the business. The announcers all sound the same. The TV shows need a facelift. Wrestling is not what's overdone, because your wrestlers change constantly. Even your best guy if he's on each week is only on for 8 to 10 minutes. You have got to change the look of your show and have different styles of shows. Whenever I say hardcore, I'm not talking about putting a girl in the ring. The other thing is build interest. What would draw a big house today? It's a matter of interest and they can't seem to get that through their thick heads from all of them. What are the two houses you could draw? George Bush vs. Saddam Hussein in an Arabian death match with a foot of sand all the way around the white house. What the hell would that draw? What have they done? They've created interest over a long period of time, haven't they? Gorbachev vs. Yeltzin, loser leaves Moscow match. Would it draw? It damn sure would. Why would it draw? Because there's been a lot of build-up, a lot of interest, and because it damn well is going to be real.

Keller: How does that translate to wrestling?

Funk: You name me one thing that they have started with for a long period of time and gone for on either side that they haven't shown. First thing is, if you set me on TV, I don't care who it's with, you put me on the TV with Vince

McMahon Jr. and give me a year, I guarantee at the end of the year, I'll draw a hell of a pay-per-view against Vince McMahon Jr. I'll guarantee I could go on there with Jim Ross and draw a big house with Jim Ross.

Keller: What is it that those currently in power aren't doing?

Funk: It's patience. It's a matter of time. If Bill Watts would have gone down there and started this, he would have started something, but he ended up with nothing. If he had the patience. Name me one thing he has that they haven't looked at already? The only reason Ric Flair has potential is because he's not there. When Sting was hurt—he couldn't understand this, nobody could understand this and that includes everybody—I said it's the simplest thing in the world. The injury caught the fans' curiosity. Put on there a legitimate 120 days until Sting is back. Every week have this big damn explosion with a countdown to the number of days before he's back. Don't let him be seen on TV. Talk about it. They want to kill the goose that laid the golden egg. You cannot kill the goose. The goose must live! The goose must live! Everybody wants to kill the goose in this business because they're looking for the quick buck. If Watts would have started back then, he would have something. Instead, he has to produce each week. Not just him, but the people above him. What is he going to do? He's going to grab at that. You have got to be able to create and figure and come up with the proper thing that's sitting there.

Keller: To be patient, you have to be confident that what you're waiting for will work. What makes you have confidence that you are going to get past the situation of giving away too much or too little on TV in exchange for ratings?

Funk: It is the waiting the angle to develop that garners ratings. People will watch it. You have to feed the issue, cater to it. Not just solely that. You'll be doing other things. You have got to start somewhere and let it sit there for a year. I guarantee ya' any amount of money if you do that, with a year of anything, you will do business. And you will do something that will produce you ratings. And in the process your show will get hotter and build momentum, while not giving too much away.

Keller: What is your philosophy on house shows and their role compared to pay-per-view and ad revenue?

Funk: I've got my own opinion on that. Now this is going to sound absolutely stupid, but I think that if you've got the right guy running

TV, he can handle that and continue on with that. Let's face it, WCW is a TV promotion. You have to shred paper. You have to build, too. But, if you get something hot enough, it will do you business all the way around, with house shows or not. But as far as house shows are concerned, I believe right now that there is a potential in this profession of doing business without television. I truly believe that. I guarantee you right now, I can go into any town within this area, any town that I pick for reasons that I know the towns, I can go in there without television and do \$20–30,000 on a show. Well, that's better than WCW's doing. How do you do it? You do it basically by looking at the rules you go by. First of all, it's cheaper to run without television. It's cheaper because both areas have been so muddled by jumping back and forth that now they're one. There's enough damn wrestlers so they can't tell if you're WCW or the WWF coming in. You go into towns that are less than 250,000. Why do you go into towns like that? Because financially it is much safer to go in there. You can flood the media for five or six thousand dollars. You cater to them. You can't do that anywhere. You come in with a star. I'm not trying to be smart, but in this area I have handled myself well. I have neither overexposed myself or underexposed myself. I can do business around here. But you go into these areas and you can get tons of spots. And you go somewhat hardcore on top of that. And you show the right promos and the right stuff. It's successful in Japan. Look what's successful in Japan. They've got 16 businesses there and I'd say at least ten of them are doing big business, I mean some business. At least six are doing big business at times.

Keller: Are you interested in working for TBS in a position similar to Bill Watts's old role in WCW?

Funk: I am interested in doing something in the business as long as it's interesting to me. There are a lot of things that interest me in this business. I think I've got sense, and I think that I've got knowledge in this business. I've been successful without a bad mark everywhere. I've been a success in every end of the business. I was a damn good announcer. I was a damn good promoter. I was a damn good wrestler. I haven't been caught. I am able to say I could do as good a job as anybody in any position. I am as valid as anybody in this country at this time. I don't have black marks. I don't intend on getting a black mark nor do I intend on taking anything that I can get a black mark from.

Keller: How, if you were to enter TBS, would you be able to fight all of the traps TBS has? Bill Watts said he could avoid them and he fell into them while creating problems of his own.

Funk: I'm sure they have a lot of traps down there I am not aware of. There are a lot of things that I think I could do better than anybody else. Believe me, I truly believe I could be a success in running that thing. One of the successful things you have to be, you have to be able to get a tremendous amount out of your wrestlers. Wrestling is a different business than anything else. Those guys have got to believe in you. You have got to have a repore with them. You have got to have them wanting to go beyond the call of duty for you. You might say, "They're not going to do that. They're a different breed of cat." I beg to differ for you. I beg to differ with you 100 percent. I think there are a bunch of guys who are proud of what they're doing. When they started wrestling back there somewhere, money wasn't the reason they got into the business. I'm not saying that's the total answer. It's a matter of being able to recognize talent and see something in somebody and pull that out of them that is appealing to the people. A lot of people that are down there didn't deserve to be down there. Bill has done a lot of things that are not looked at on a favorable side, through the sheets or elsewhere, but some of them were necessary to be done. But I believe that the big key to this business is not by realizing what this guy did over there, it's what you see in him. If you are good at what I talk about, you are not wasting money. That is where the key of it is. That is like taking a guy like Norman and getting some little thing out of him, or whoever it might be. That's just one small example. The thing is to be able to spot what you need. That is the most difficult thing in the world to do, to spot talent and utilize it. Not necessarily proven talent. Even if they are proven over there, that's not why you take them. You take them for what they can do for you. If you look at him for what he is somewhere else, you're going to get a muddled down rendition of what he was over there. People say Dusty Rhodes should be off TV. Let me tell you something, if Virg has two and a half minutes on TV and you tell him that's all he's got—I don't care if he has all the heat in the world with the sheets or with the guys—that guy can talk and be funny—not funny, but fun on TV. He can be fun for whatever segment it is. You have to put him into that comfortable light where he will be liked by the people. Not where he's talking about something you don't want him talking about. That is talent, talent that can be utilized in some way or form. You could put Bush in the ring against Saddam. Does anybody think about how old they are. Age has no bearing if it's the right situation. I'm not saying we want to go with a bunch of old-timers. We damn sure don't want that. I want youth in there. But if you've got somebody who can be utilized, I don't care if they're 150 years old and need to be helped on TV every day and need help getting back in

their iron lung, damn sure go ahead and use them if they can help your ratings. I find the guy humorous. I look at the fat ass and laugh at him. Quote that. There's some talent there. There's a funny individual. In his own way, he's not laughed at. He can be a fun guy. You can walk in the room with Dusty Rhodes and he'll take over the damn room. That's a guy you want to put on TV some way. I'm not talking about putting him on for a 20 minute match.

Keller: Who do you believe is out there today with potential to be big money-makers?

Funk: See, I'm telling you all of this stuff and they're just going to read it and take off on it. One guy I'd pick right away among a lot of guys, he has the potential of being the most liked individual in the country—Hawk. He could be the biggest babyface ever, the answer to Hogan. He has that likable, lovable quality to him. I dealt with Brody for years. If I can deal with Brody, I can deal with anybody. I think he's got great qualities. There's a kid running around England, Fighting Finlay, quality, quality, quality, quality. I like Merced (Tito Santana) and he has a quality about him, a true piece of quality. He may be old, but he still has value. I see developing all of the talent that is down there in Mexico. Whenever you've got the type of Spanish population in this country that we have and don't have a Spanish wrestler, we're shooting ourselves in the foot. We should have our heads shot off.

Keller: What about Japan wrestling? What can carry over to this country?

Funk: I think that we are moving into another era, too. Those guys have all been influenced by us. It bleeds through over there. They've got great wrestlers over there. I just grabbed the three names I listed above out of a hat. Look at Japan, Baba has the fabulous six, Misawa, Kawada, Kikuchi, Kobashi, Tsuruta, all those guys. What have I named you? They are names. They're not objects, they're people. They are personalities that are their true personalities. They are personalities that are lovable. They have established personalities, their own personalities that people understand and like that are them. Kobashi is not anybody else. He is just Kobashi when he gets on TV.

Keller: Would you like to get the true personalities over on TV rather than creating outrageous personalities?

Funk: I think the human race is outrageous enough as it is. I think individuals are outrageous. I think we all have things that are lovable. I'm not talking necessarily about guys you can build your territory around, but they are

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appealing. You have to bring that out. You have to have a feel for that. That's what I think the business needs to be built around.

Keller: How important is it for the mainstream public to believe that wrestling match finishes are not predetermined?

Funk: They're not.

Keller: Not what?

Funk: They're not predetermined. That's how important it is. Do you follow me? Why did they come to the SilverDome? Why would they pay to see Yeltzin and Gorbachev? You would want to see what was going to happen between them. You don't picture them going back and talking behind some door about what they're going to do, would ya'? Same with Saddam and Bush. That's how important it is. We are entertainment, too. Vince McMahon has said it time and time again, wrestling's not entertainment, it's not wrestling, it's something in between. I don't know what the hell it is.

Keller: Is it impossible to draw big money if the public—even the most skeptical or most well-informed—believes the finishes are predetermined?

Funk: You have to make them believe. I said some things about Ric Flair that were so damn bad, that Ric Flair absolutely hated them. He did not like me for what I said.

Keller: What's an example?

Funk: When I put some little guy on with a robe and damn white wig on his head and painted a

yellow stripe down his back. He thought it was detrimental. I didn't think it was detrimental. That's the way I felt. If you don't hit close to home, where the hell are you going? And vice-versa. And if he says some things about me I don't like, what the hell. It should create a little animosity between each other. Then you get competitive. Then you try to get revenge. It becomes personal between the two of them. When it becomes personal, it has a better chance of drawing money. If you create that atmosphere, it is very important to success. Do you think Dusty liked all that stuff I said about him. You know he doesn't like it. Do you think Abdullah liked all the things I said about him in Japan. I didn't like everything he said about me to the press.

Keller: *WCW puts most of their stress on TBS. The WWF puts most of their stress on WWF Superstars. Where is the balance between cable and syndicated ratings? Which would you stress?*

Funk: I would try to do the best possible ratings I could on all of the shows. You've got to be creative. You have to create something of each show for interest and keep it on there and keep it going. That is one of the things that is most lacking on television today. If you watch it, we all know it's like a soap opera, but you have to have your thing that is different among all of them. For example, you better plan your shows way out before the ratings period. You don't want to just put out the hottest match for that day. You have to create a thing of interest on all of your shows. It has to be running at least 5 or 6 weeks before you go into there. Know where you're going before you get into each of those ratings periods. You get yourself set with something that is going to culminate whenever that ratings period is on for that three weeks. Then you produce ratings and don't have to worry about it. That's how you produce ratings in ratings time. That's not so hard to do. I mean, I don't think it is. You have to figure something out that will culminate during those three weeks. That's for sure.

Keller: *What about Jim Cornette's statements that not one style of wrestling appeals to everyone in every part of the country and that each area needs wrestling tailored for them?*

Funk: No, I say that your common people are all the same throughout the country because not all of them cater to the same thing. What you're looking for is the percentage above the regular fans. Whenever you can get into their interest, that's when you're going to do a successful show. But you've got to do that for anything. Of course he's right. You have to have a combination of all of those things rolled into

each show. But that is true to any audience. Sure we could go to Saudi Arabia, we better have a Saudi Arabian on the card. If you go to England, you better have a Davey Boy on the card. He's right on that point. But as far as general appeal goes, some like great wrestling, there's your older group that likes a different style, there's your younger kids, there's other people that like the entertainment aspect. It has to be a good, fit combination of them all. But you have to remember one thing, the matches are not predetermined. That is the most important. The matches are real, no matter how much entertainment you go with. We are in the same business as a magician.

Keller: *You don't even go so far as to say to the general public that it's an illusion?*

Funk: It's not an illusion.

Keller: *But magicians say that, that's why I bring that up.*

Funk: A good one will say, "It's magic" and leave it at that.

Keller: *When you look at wrestling five years from now, you talk about being optimistic about the future in wrestling. Are you optimistic if certain things happen, or are you sure whatever is necessary to make wrestling thrive again will occur?*

Funk: I'm optimistic in a couple of ways. If wrestling continues to go in the way it is going, I'm very optimistic for a different style of wrestling. I am very optimistic, like I said earlier, grabbing combinations from here and there. I am also optimistic that there is enough word of mouth and people out there that love the sport, that if you go into a major town once a month and have the money to do it, you can over a period of a year or year-and-a-half of time, I'm optimistic you can do big business once a month. I am very optimistic. You can call it cult or wrestling fans or hardcore fans, that word of mouth will work if you give a good product with TV or without. I am very optimistic as far as that is concerned. That is if wrestling disappears as we know it right now, with the big two, it can be that way. But I really don't expect them to disappear. It depends on how self-destructive they are. It's not necessary for the big two to disappear. I see more of that going on. I don't see more of the local promoters. I mean, I see more local promoters, but not with television. The profits are not there. I'm optimistic about spot shows. The only thing I don't agree about with Jim Cornette is television. I know he would argue with me to day's end, but it's where you are and what you are doing. In his area again his way might be necessary. But I know what I can

draw within this area and within this state. If I had my druthers, what would I druther? Is that what you're talking about? Network. Saturday night, 11 o'clock. If you could talk one of the major stations into carrying you, you could put together a wrestling show and produce people in an arena and once a year you have yourself a big pay-per-view. Of course, again as I say all of these examples of what should be done in the business, you'll see some of this that I'm talking about, you'll see them go ahead to do it all. And I'm the dumb sonofabitch sitting here without a job telling them. Hulk Hogan. Who could Hulk Hogan wrestle that would do \$30 million? George Foreman. Without television. What do you think it would do? With millions of dollars of publicity, who cares what they've done in their lives. Why would you pay for it, you don't know the outcome.

Keller: *Where do you get new talent for five years from now? How do you make tomorrow's celebrities?*

Funk: There is a lot of young talent out there?

Keller: *Where does it develop?*

Funk: The same way it does, through independent promoters, through people like that. It starts with the ability to spot it. It develops with the right build-up to it. With the right seasoning of it. You have to know how to handle young talent and prepare it to do your business. That's the bottom line on it. It's not that complicated. It's not a complicated business. They make it complicated.

Keller: *What about stereotypes? Should wrestling be more in tune with today's society and raise its standards?*

Funk: Raise its standards?! If wrestling's going to keep up with the rest of the world, it better lower its standards. Look at your local talk show? All of that crap.

Keller: *Do negative stereotypes of minority groups and women need to change so the more intelligent fan who has money who wants to see the drama and athleticism of wrestling, but is not going to be drawn into a Tony Atlas vs. Robbie Walker "there's not room for two Blacks in WCW" scenario, will support the promotion? By the way, that was not only a long question, but a loaded one.*

Funk: Definitely. If you try to tell me Criss-Cross aren't characters and portraying the hottest thing in the damn country-heck, they've got their pants on backwards. If you had two guys walk in a wrestling ring like that, you'd go, "My god, what did they do to those guys." It's

just how it's handled. Does that make any sense? Again, there are numerous pieces of talent out there. It's picking the right ones.

Keller: *Do you enjoy the behind-the-scenes politics? The egos of promoters and wrestlers?*

Funk: I love dealing with the wrestlers. I love wrestlers.

Keller: *Do wrestlers like you? Or would they? The wrestlers didn't like Bill Watts or Jim Herd.*

Funk: I think they would. One thing, I think wrestlers are a breed all their own. That's the main attraction to everybody who reads the sheets—the boys themselves. They're really true characters to even want to be in the business. As far as them liking me is I'd like to think them liking me—me being honest—I'm full of bullshit, but I'm also very honest. I would try to do everything that is good for the company. Some times guys can't like you for what you have to do to help the company. And I don't blame them. I'm not talking about shitting on somebody, I'm mean being honest. I try to be very honest with them and try to make the choices where I could be honest to them. I'm not talking about liking guys because I like them, although there should be a certain amount of that, too, in there. You've got to do that. Another thing is, if the business is not enjoyable to you, don't do it. If you don't really like it don't do it. That's what a lot of people are finding out.

Keller: *What is the weakest part of your political abilities?*

Funk: Knowing that the way a guy feeds his family is at stake. Having to tell him to go down the road and try something else.

Keller: *You would or wouldn't do that? Would you be too compassionate or not enough?*

Funk: I would do it, but it would be the toughest part of the job, letting somebody go. It would be bone deep. The one wonderful thing about it before was that you could get a guy booking somewhere else. Now you can't. That's tough. You've got to make enemies. It's hard to have somebody say, "You're not getting the job done."

Keller: *Where do you stand on the issue of steroids—the wrestler's "rights" to use steroids to advance his career versus the creation of an illegal, unfair advantage?*

Funk: I am definitely against steroids in all

sports and I've always said this. The reason I'm against them in all sports is because I want my kids or grandkids to be able to compete without having to do that if they're a good enough individual or athlete. It's a very tough question, though. I mean, does this rule this guy out because he wants to and he loves it enough that he's willing to do this stuff and possibly destroy his physical ability to do a lot of things in later life? He's willing to give up a lot. And it doesn't always involve money, either. It doesn't always involve ego.

Keller: *A lot of it is because they are blinded or at least distracted by short-term potential fame and money—fame and money that is achieved because and only because promoters turn their heads to what is often obvious use.*

Funk: Definitely. At 20 or 22 we all looked that way. Therefore, it should be controlled and not left up to the individual because then you will have a guy who is going to hurt himself. It should be controlled by the company to the best of their ability. That doesn't mean it's easy to control. It's such a tough question because one guy is covering his use so he stays and another one doesn't know about the cover up so he loses out. It becomes complicated. It's not just black and white. I don't know if they will ever have a test that says, "This guys does and this guy doesn't," definitely put it into effect. You've got to stop it. It's a proven fact that it causes damage. So therefore you cannot leave that into the hands of the guys. If you are one who tries to do best for your fellow man, and stuff like that, and try to do what's best for him, you have got to try to take control of it. I don't know the real answer for that and I don't think anybody does. Let's face it, for a time period there it was very evident it had gone astray. Now it's not quite so evident. You've got to try to do what's best for your guys. It's like if you were running this country. You have to have responsibilities leading the people or in this case, the wrestlers working for you. Yeah, definitely do your best to control it. Whether you can or not, I very seriously don't know, because of the knowledge. It's so much of an enhancement, it's a very necessary evil in the wrestlers' minds. It's a very difficult thing. I look at the guys having a much better life than they have now. Fewer dates working and very big houses. I look for the tour situation to come into effect in the States, two weeks on, two weeks off type schedule. Two on, two off. You're going to see very much a reflection of Japanese wrestling and their successful methods. Not necessarily putting the guys on a bus or a train and having them arrive together. I'm just talking about some of the things. I see the tour deal being very successful.

"One guy I'd pick right away among a lot of guys, he has the potential of being the most liked individual in the country—Hawk. He could be the biggest babyface ever, the answer to Hogan. He has that likable, lovable quality to him."

Keller: *How much do you want to work for WCW in a front office position? Do you think you would do a good job in the role Bill Watts and Jim Herd had?*

Funk: I definitely think I can handle it. You're talking about a tremendous endeavor at this time, not a small endeavor. It's like, do you really want to be president. Very seriously, before you answer that question, you better think about it a little bit. What are you willing to give up at this time in your life. Believe me, when you get that one, it's a night and day deal.

Keller: *Are you willing?*

Funk: I would be willing. I don't think it will happen, though. You have to understand the commitment. When you answer something like that, it's damn near—boy, if you're successful, there's nothing better, but if you don't get it done...

Keller: *What is your impression of what Bill Watts did as V.P.?*

Funk: He did a lot of necessary things, businesswise that had to get done. Sometimes he didn't, but with the financial situation, they needed to get control of their swings. Somebody had to take control of the damn swings financially. It was very, very much of a mess. I'm not sure all of the financial things needed... I think a boy's salary is very important and we know that there were too many salaries over there. Sometimes when you—and this is going to be like throwing a knife in my back—you can get people down to a level that is almost disrespectful in comparison to other sports. That's what you have to watch. Your boys are very talented and very good, and hopefully if you're successful, who should be paid? It's those boys busting their ass, and everybody else busting their ass. I'm one of those, if the money

is there and they're producing it, damn well pay it. Being very honest with you, I am a product of nepotism myself. I think that Bill could have handled that much better because I think his boy, being who he is and being raised in a wrestling family, I think that boy wants to be in the wrestling business and I truthfully think he could have been very successful in the business—and he still might be—but it needed to be handled properly. Sometimes you have to sew the seed before you reap the harvest. To me, a much better scenario is to send him to Memphis for four or five months and then put him on a \$500 a year salary. Then he can say to the other wrestlers, "Look at my damn kid, he's only making this." And then kick him in the ass when he comes out of the ring every time so the boys feel sorry for him. Then build him up. Everybody's got to get along. I'm saying that on the boy's behalf because I know that boy loves the business. I know his daddy loves him or he wouldn't have done that for him. I'm talking very seriously. He was doing what he thought was best, but he was his boy's worst enemy because if he would have taken the other scenario I said, it would have made a difference. The hardest thing in the world is to push your own son and have it accepted. My father was successful at it. He didn't push me, he just screamed at me and cussed me out and kicked me and every other damn thing. Times have changed. I think if he had Erik Watts up there in Tennessee, he would have paid a price. Paying that price is sometimes necessary before you can have acceptance in the crazy world of pro wrestling. There's nothing wrong with putting your loved ones in a position, because that's what this world is about. I don't have any boys and that's probably a blessing. You have to remember the world of professional wrestling doesn't pertain to anything else.

Keller: *What did you think of the week-to-week television Bill Watts produced?*

Funk: He went from one extreme onto another extreme. I think that his positive times were when he was going with the wrestling end of things. There was talk all over the country and then it fizzled and died. It's having a longer vision, and it's a very difficult thing to do with that much television each week. He tried to. Along the line, that paper shredder got to rolling. That's why you have to make sure you want this. Believe me, four TV shows per week is murder. Six is murder. That beast of television down there doesn't stop eating, it always needs more. That's why you have to come up with successful long term things on shows other than wrestling itself. When you have that much TV, you better look at producing a fun show, a pleasing show, that doesn't always necessarily—you can't just rely

on wrestling. You have to come up with other things with tremendous interest. But we spend no time compared to what other people spend. If you get into a movie deal, you'll do three pages a day, if you're lucky. With TV, you'll do maybe eight pages a day. Well, that's from morning to night. A commercial, you'll take the entire day shooting it. With TV, you have to spend time with the segments. If it's a Grill segment, they have to be appealing, otherwise you'll fall on your ass and be a dead duck.

Keller: *And one bad one hurts the credibility of future ones.*

Funk: If you can start off with about four or five good ones, you can have a bad one. There should be different types of segments. There should be characters that are on there that are different. You've got your commentators on there, they've got to do a hell of a job and be fun. They've got to be able to take advantage of what happens in the ring. They have to treat wrestling as serious material, but have fun while they're doing it. The formats are what need to be changed. What is wrong with changing the name of the Saturday show and adding a new damn intro.

Keller: *What is your impression of Monday Night Raw?*

Funk: You have to treat wrestling, I think, dead serious. If something funny happens, you make light of it. But the wrestling has to be good wrestling. It's what you surround it with, and Raw smells fresh from what I've read.

Keller: *Do you think a non-wrestling executive can come in and change things and be fresh—a good kind of fresh—if they don't understand the business?*

Funk: Of course not. One thing you have to have is a relationship with your talent. You have to realize you are dealing with individuals. You are dealing with personalities, pride, everything. The main thing, I'm sure they have a lot of wonderful ideas as far as the context of what a show should look like, but they need to be able to deal with the wrestlers. Do you understand what I'm saying? Maybe I'm wrong, but in this case I know I'm right. I know I'm right on everything (laughs). Yeah, I bet.

Keller: *What do you feel strongly about that we haven't talked about?*

Funk: I am not negative on this business. Why did Raw come around? Because there was a need for it. They finally got there, a year and half too late. It might lead to something else. WCW, the same way. If they don't even exist, I

am a strong believer that wrestling in this country is very alive. Wrestling will see many more million dollar houses. It's not my opinion, it will just be. Just like you'll see a few more cowboys that will be big box office. The same way with wrestling. It will not just disappear off the face of the Earth. There's tons of us out there. It's just creating that interest. TBS needs to make a decision to produce great matches for every show and make it a TV company. Spend a week with them talking about all of this stuff instead of letting them run up and down the road. Work with them on all that stuff and make it a television production. It sounds like I'm talking about a million things, but I'm on one view. If you do house shows, make sure you create and nurture an issue and then go back to house shows. Concentrate first on getting the ratings up to a 3.0 or 4.0.

Keller: *Do you need a superstar to center the promotion around?*

Funk: You've got six shows. When Vince was hot, he had 10 guys who were nationally known. You definitely have to feature one. You have to pick that guy out and cater to him and watch him and mold him. Hawk is a guy that would be the biggest babyface you could have. He would be more than appreciative of the opportunity. If I took Hawk, he would be a total babyface. Whatever you want to do, put him on the damn TV and the kids would love him. He has a wonderful heart. He has an appeal to him, a wonderful appeal to him that no one has spotted in the business. If Hawk would sit down there with you for ten minutes, you would go home and start telling everybody about who you sat next to and how funny he was. He is a wonderful guy with charisma and a great personality. He's only been portrayed one way. I guarantee he wouldn't miss dates and be a fruitcake. He would take that change and run with it. And he's insane. He has that little quirk that everybody loves and everybody loves to see. Of all the people that I have to name out of the clear blue, he would be the one.

Keller: *Terry, Thanks so much for your time. The readers appreciate your honesty.*

Funk: My pleasure. I hope what I said made sense.

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